



## FOLK HORROR, CORNISH STYLE

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH ENYS  
MEN DIRECTOR MARK JENKIN

"BLOODY HELL, KEN!" THE HORROR OF ALANBROOKE HALL

CRYPTO-CURSES BITCOIN BILLIONAIRES BITE THE DUST

SUPERNATURAL SOUNDS DEADLY FAIRY MUSIC

THE  
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FOLKLORE  
MYTHS AND LEGENDS  
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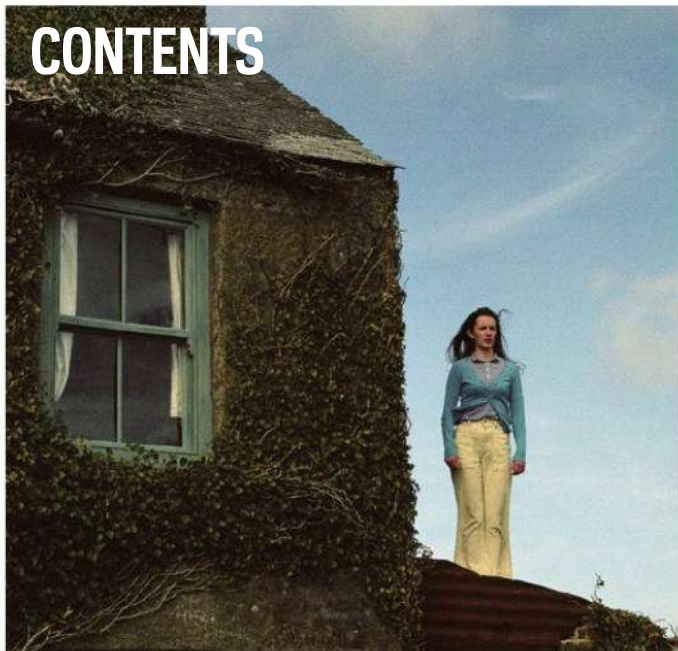
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## EDITOR

DAVID SUTTON  
drsutton@forteantimes.com

## FOUNDING EDITORS

BOB RICKARD (ft-bobrickard@mail.com)  
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)

## NEWS EDITOR

IAN SIMMONS (simmons@forteantimes.com)

## ART DIRECTOR

ETIENNE GILFILLAN (etienne@forteantimes.com)

## BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

DAVID V BARRETT (dvbarrett@forteantimes.com)

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

ABIGAIL MASON

## RESIDENT CARTOONIST

HUNT EMERSON

## PRODUCTION MANAGER

LEE BOYMAN (lee.boyman@metropolis.co.uk)

## ADVERTISING

BEN LORTON (ben.lorton@metropolis.co.uk)

## FT ON THE INTERNET

www.forteantimes.com  
www.facebook.com/forteantimes

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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

## MAPPING THE OLD, WEIRD BRITAIN

We begin the year with an anniversary celebration: it's now half a century since one of the best-loved books on many a fortean's bookshelf made its first appearance in 1973. *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* was a hefty, impressive-looking tome, packed with weird and wonderful stories, a wealth of historical images and fantastic black and white artwork by some of Britain's top illustrators. But what was unexpected then, and remains so after 50 years, was the book's source – it appeared courtesy of Reader's Digest, a publishing institution in the 1970s, but hardly one known for its esoteric or folkloric interests.

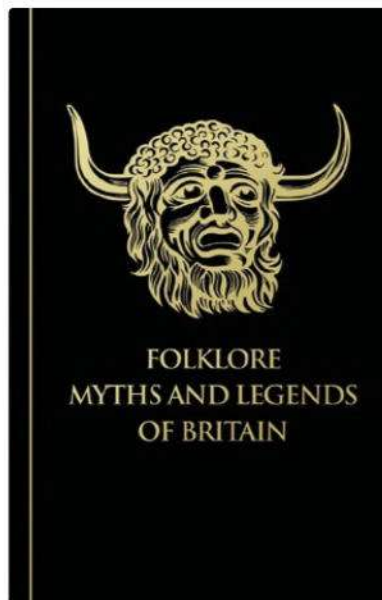
To be fair, RD had put out an equally weighty volume in 1968 – *Treasures of Britain* was a beautifully produced gazetteer and guide to the nation's historic sites and notable buildings, the inspiration for many a 1970s day trip, and featured a brass rubbing of a knight emblazoned in gold on its faux leather cover. *FMLB* took a similar approach, but instead of presenting the 'official face' of Britain's history it documented the weird old Albion of lore and legend – screaming skulls and highwaymen, strange traditions and folk customs, witches and ghosts. It seemed to announce itself as the dark, twisted cousin of *Treasures*, an impression heightened by the sedate knight's replacement by the terrifying horned head of the Dorset Ooser, glinting ominously from the book's black cover. And as Billy Rough documents in this month's cover story, *FMLB* certainly made an impression – it wouldn't be an exaggeration to describe it as a key text of the Haunted Generation (as our resident Seventies obsessive Bob Fischer affirms), as well as a gateway to forteana, a folk horror sourcebook, and, after 50 years, a pure nostalgic pleasure.

Did you come upon *FMLB* at a tender age? Did it have a formative impact on your nascent fortean interests? Was your household copy jealously guarded by

your dad? We'd be delighted to hear your memories of the book, so do share them in our letters pages...

And if you want to hear more, tune

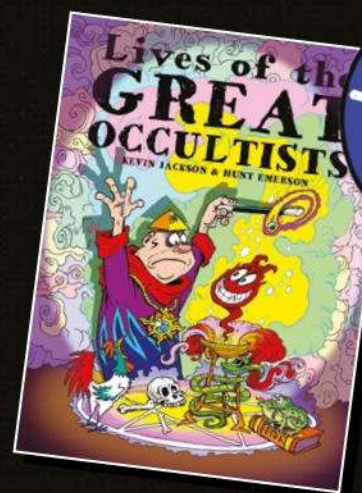
into the Folklore Podcast, which in the New Year will also be turning its attention to Reader's Digest's weirdest hour with an episode featuring a panel discussion about *FMLB* in which listeners share their stories and a panel of experts discuss the book's impact on the field. Follow the Folklore Podcast on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or Mastadon and watch out for the episode early in 2023.



## ERRATA

**FT423:11:** Tyler Greenfield, collections assistant at the Tate Geological Museum in asper, Wyoming, wrote in to point out that our news item "Frog Ness Monster" quoted a misleading *Daily Star* article of 7 June: "In that original article, it was claimed that I proposed the Loch Ness monster to be a giant frog. However, this was based on a misinterpretation of one of my social media posts, as I did not actually propose this. I do not think that Nessie is a giant frog, nor do I think it is an unknown animal at all. I think the sightings can be explained by misidentifications of known animals or inanimate objects, or by hoaxes." On 14 September, the *Star* published a follow-up article, rowing back on the possibility that 'Nessie' is a 'giant frog', and allowed Tyler to give his own account of how such an idea came about. "Out of the thousands of sightings, only one matches that [giant frog] description. This sighting was reported by a diver named Duncan Macdonald in a 1934 newspaper article. Sometime in the 1880s, Macdonald allegedly saw a frog-like creature 'as big as a goat' while salvaging a shipwreck in the loch. I suspect this story to be a hoax for several reasons. In my opinion Macdonald's story was an attempt to sell more newspapers by taking advantage of the public's growing interest."





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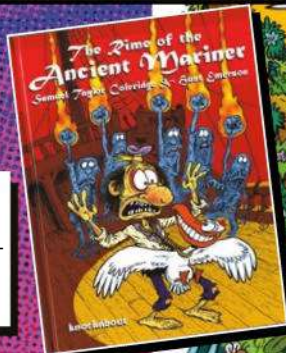
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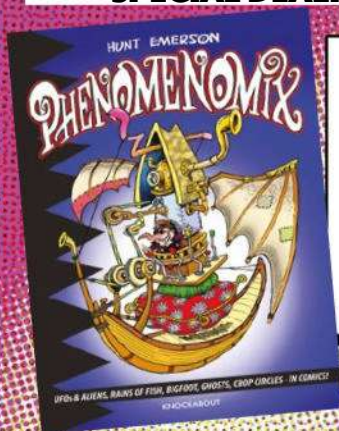
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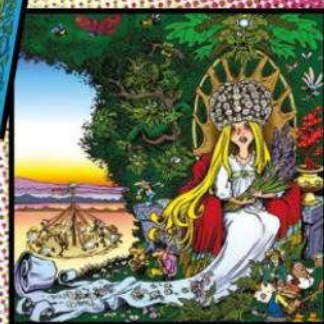


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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## ASSORTED OCCULT UNPLEASANTNESS



BALENCIAGA

**ABOVE:** One of the since-pulled Balenciaga ads that has prompted both outrage and an enthusiastic search for 'demonic' clues.  
**BELOW:** The unfortunate amphibian apparently used in the hope of influencing a criminal court case in St Catherine, Jamaica.

### DEMONS IN BONDAGE

Spanish fashion house Balenciaga got an unexpected response to two of its recent, spectacularly ill-advised advertising campaigns; one which featured small children holding teddy bears in bondage wear, and another where handbags were photographed on top of legal documents relating to laws against distributing child abuse images. These led to widespread accusations that the label was promoting and supporting child abuse. Inevitably, eagle-eyed social media posters went a step further and scrutinised Balenciaga's campaigns in detail, finding what they believe to be "demonic symbols" hidden in these and other photographs. A summary in a TikTok video from music producer Marc Baigent points out "a child's drawing of the Devil" behind a boy in one shot and a "random black hood, perfectly placed



and tied, resembling a Satanic cult" on the floor beside him. He is wearing a pair of red trainers, supposedly resembling a Devil, and a roll of Balenciaga tape on the floor shows two 'A's, interpreted as spelling "Baal", described as an ancient god to whom children were sacrificed. It also says: "Lastly, one of the dolls with a padlock around its neck. Coincidence?" Prompted by such discoveries, others have been stretching the talents of Google translate to breaking point, feeding in variations of "Balenciaga" and claiming meaningful results. One Twitter user typed in "Ba Len Ci Aga",

which Translate assumed was in the African language Hausa, and got "Do what you want" back, which the poster connected with Crowley's "Do what thou wilt". Another broke it down as "Baal [sic] enci aga", which Google Translate interprets as "Baal is king" in Latin, with both confirming the suspicions of those with an inclination to be suspicious. *news.com.au*, 30 Nov; *newsweek.com*, 2 Dec; *thecut.com*, 5 Dec 2022.

### FROG FRIGHTENER

In Jamaica, the allegedly occult use of a padlock was also creating disquiet when a frog with its mouth padlocked shut was found outside the Spanish Town courthouse in St Catherine. Onlooker Julani Brandford said, "Lawd Jeezas, dis yah one seal," following the discovery of the frog, adding, "Smaddy mouth lock up again. A so dem wuk pon witness fi mek dem buss di case." The use of "spiritualists"

in an attempt to influence court cases is widespread in Jamaica. Often this simply involves plaintiffs anointing themselves with "courthouse oils" to tip a case in their favour, but more elaborate methods are also employed. Obeah Man Reuben Williams said that various animals could be used to influence cases: "Some people use chicken, some people use goat, some people use cow and pig.... The cow is for universal purpose, and the chicken is for minor operations." He explained that a cow's tongue is often used "because the bull represents a mighty force" and suggested that this might be involved with the padlocked frog. "For some high science, yuh can use a piece of the cow tongue and put inside of the frog belly, but yuh affi force it dung him stomach and padlock it." He added that this required some serious magic: "At first you have to conjure the spirit that is going to be invoked. The person that is going to do the invocation, to get the spirit, would have to become powerful enough, or have the knowledge enough, to call on that spirit to place whoever mouth yuh wah fi close, and place dem as the bullfrog." *Jamaica-star.com*, 2 Nov 2022.

### BOARD TEENAGERS

Eleven teenagers at the Agricultural Technical Institute in Hato, Colombia, were found collapsed in a corridor after using a Ouija board. The students, aged 13 to 17, were suffering from violent vomiting, abdominal pain and muscle spasms. "The children were passed out. At the time they were found they were short of breath and thick drool was coming out of their mouths,"





## THEY DO LIKE IT UP 'EM!

Objects removed from unwise places

PAGE 6



## GRISWOLD VAMPIRE

An 18th century American bloodsucker

PAGE 12



## NOT ROCKET SCIENTISTS

The latest crap criminals to end up behind bars

PAGE 22



ABOVE: The Agricultural Technical Institute in Hato, Colombia, where 11 pupils reportedly collapsed after using a Ouija board.

said Jose Pablo Toloza Rondón, the mayor of Hato. He added: "It is not ruled out that it was the Ouija board, that is part of the investigation." The students were seen by doctors at a nearby health centre, but five had to be taken to the Manuela Beltrán Hospital for further treatment. Juan Pablo Vargas Noguera, a doctor at the hospital, said: "We did not find psychological alteration in the children, taking into account that it was said that it would have been from playing the Ouija board. The medical report says it was due to food poisoning." It was later found, after the students were interviewed, that they had all drunk from the same glass of water, which was the likely source of the infection. *independent.co.uk*, 12 Nov 2022.

## A PLAQUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES

In Larne, Northern Ireland, a proposed historic plaque commemorating the last witch trial held in Ireland had its wording changed after the intervention of a local councillor. A line saying, "Today the community recognises your innocence" was dropped after Ulster Unionist councillor Keith Turner questioned whether it was within the council's remit to say whether those involved were

*"How can you be accused of being a witch if there is no such thing?"*

innocent or guilty. At the trial, which took place at Islandmagee in 1711, eight women and a man were found guilty of witchcraft, put in the stocks and sentenced to a year in prison. Alliance councillor Robert Logan said, "There are no such thing as witches. How can you be accused of being a witch if there is no such thing as a witch?", but Turner pointed out that the crime of witchcraft existed until 1821, so they could have been found guilty of the crime. Previously, another councillor, Jack McKee, had objected to the plaque, saying it could become a "shrine to paganism" and was "anti-God" and said that he "could not tell whether or not the women had been rightly or wrongly convicted as he didn't have the facts and was not going to support Devil worship". Alliance Councillor Maeve Donnelly welcomed the plaque and said: "It is long overdue that these women (and one man) have been commemorated." *belfasttelegraph.co.uk*, 23 Nov 2022.

## WITCH HUNTS NOT OVER

In Borno State, northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram jihadists carried out a witch hunt on the orders of local commander Ali Guyile after the alleged sudden death of his children overnight. His followers rounded up 40 women in a village near Gwoza and accused them of causing the children's death by witchcraft. Guyile first had 14 of the women killed by having their throats slit, then followed this up several days later by murdering a further 12. Northeast Nigeria is the frontline of a struggle between Nigerian state forces and two rival jihadist factions, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa, but accusations of witchcraft are common in both the Islamic north of the country and the Christian south. Meanwhile, a rise in sorcery killings in Papua New Guinea has been blamed on instabilities caused by climate change, natural disasters, economic inequality, tribal violence, gender violence and a mistrust of government. On the island, there has been a long tradition of sorcery, but violence against sorcerers, which is known as "sanguma", has not been part of New Guinea's customs until recently. According to film maker Paul Wolfram, who is making a documentary about the killings, people are now looking for someone to blame when there is a premature death in their community, saying "One young man told me without any qualms or hesitation that they recently had to kill a witch in his village, because if they didn't take care of it, nobody else would stop what they perceive as sorcery." He added that this "belief in sorcery has completely dominated people's mindsets up there at the moment." Wolfram hopes his film will raise awareness of the problem in neighbouring New Zealand. *rnz.co.nz*, 11 Nov; *dailymail.co.uk*, 15 Nov 2022.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## MYSTERY OF PUTIN, THE CANCER DOCTOR AND HEALING BATHS OF ANTLER BLOOD

Irish Independent, 2 April 2022.

## My daughter saw that scene of ET sick and it broke her

Irish Times, 3 May 2022

## NEEDLE-STICK MAN HAD TO 'ABANDON SEX', COURT IS TOLD

Irish Independent, 7 May 2022.

## Demons to make Saints pay for sins

(Queensland) Courier Mail, 7 May 2022.

## QUIT CHEESE, GO BACK TO WORK

Sun, 14 May 2022.

## Decapitation caused woman's death, inquest told

Irish Independent, 28 May 2022





## SIDELINES

### HAUNTED AIRLINE?

Since July, American Airlines flights on the New York City to Los Angeles and Santa Ana to Dallas-Fort Worth routes have been plagued by a mysterious voice grunting, moaning and groaning over the in-flight announcement systems, sometimes for the whole flight, on both Airbus A321 and Boeing 737-800 planes. Passenger Bradley P Allen said, "It was like the moans and groans of someone in extreme pain," and while the noises clearly sound like a human voice in recordings made by travellers, American Airlines' official response is that "the sounds were caused by a mechanical issue with the PA amplifier." *waxy.org*, 23 Sept 2022.

### ALIENS?

When an eerie circular pink glow lit up the underside of clouds near the Australian town of Midura, locals were disconcerted and speculation ran rife, ranging from an alien invasion to the beginning of the Apocalypse. However, it soon became clear that the light was coming from a nearby medical cannabis growing facility. Normally its blinds automatically come down at night, but they had failed, allowing the glow from its growlights to leak out and illuminate the sky. *BBC News*, 22 July 2022.

### DESPERATELY SEEKING PSYCHIC

Commuters heading into Manchester have been surprised by a large billboard saying, "Psychic wanted – you know where to apply". Mandomedia, the company who put up the sign for the mystery advertiser said it was not a joke and that the person was deadly serious, but felt a real medium "would know exactly when, where, and how to contact them", adding, "We are seriously invested in this experiment and it would be incredible if it actually works." *mirror.co.uk*, 31 Aug 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

## THEY DO LIKE IT UP 'EM 2 | Unusual things in ill-advised places



NEWSUNIONS / SWINS

When his stomach started swelling and he began experiencing abdominal pain, a 45-year-old man from Balipadar, India, admitted to his family that 10 days earlier some of his friends had inserted a steel cup into his rectum as a prank while he was drunk, and he hadn't been able to remove it. He had not wanted to admit this because the incident had taken place at Surat in Gujarat, a state where alcohol is illegal, as well as for fear of embarrassment, although he had been unable to defecate since the incident. Concerned family members rushed him to hospital where X-rays showed a cup of around 3-4in (8cm) in diameter and 6in (15cm) long jammed in his rectum. After initially trying to take it out the way it went in, doctors had to resort to surgery because of the size of the item, cutting through the intestine to extract it in a 2.5-hour operation. The man remained under observation in hospital for several days after the operation and was expected to make a full recovery. *dailymail.co.uk*, 24 Aug 2022.

• Also in India, a 27-year-old man arrived at a hospital in West Bengal suffering from



### Some friends had inserted a steel cup into the man's rectum

severe abdominal pain. X-rays showed that he had a 7.5-inch (19cm) deodorant can lodged in his colon near the anus. He told doctors that he had put it there himself 20 days earlier but was unable to explain why he had done so. He, too, required surgery to remove the item and, as well as posting a photo of the triumphant surgical team holding the retrieved can, the hospital shared a brief and rather graphic video of the

ABOVE: A steel cup that ended up where the Sun don't shine. LEFT: The triumphant surgical team pose with the offending deodorant can.

moment of extraction. "This was a big deal for us. We treated him with the utmost care," said Tapas Ghosh, the superintendent at the Burdwan Medical College hospital, where the operation was carried out, although the patient suffered damage to his intestines and oesophagus that will require additional surgery. *nypost.com*, 15 Sept 2022.

• A further Indian case involved a man named only as Jagram, who attended Bhind District Hospital with excruciating pain in his bladder. After ordering blood tests, scans and X-rays, Dr Prateek Mishra found that Jagram's problem was down to a four-inch (10cm) nail in his bladder. He was unwilling to explain to Mishra or his colleagues exactly how the nail had ended up there, but it was clear that it had been in his bladder for at least a year. The medics operated for an hour to extract the nail in what the hospital described as a "first", and Jagram recovered with no ill effects. *mirror.co.uk*, 19 Aug 2022.

BURDWAN MEDICAL COLLEGE





● Following a visit to the doctors because he was experiencing a burning sensation while urinating, a 79-year-old Japanese man was given an ultrasound scan of his bladder. This revealed “a large object accompanied by acoustic shadows”, prompting medics to take an X-ray that showed “a wire-like coiled foreign body”. After being shown these, the man admitted that he had inserted a thin plastic skipping rope into his bladder via his urethra but refused to explain why.

Urologists at Dokkyo Medical University in Mibu, near Tokyo, then took a CT scan to try and work out how to extract the item. This revealed that it had become too tangled to pull back out through the penis. “Wires inserted into the bladder usually curl up as the bladder contracts; therefore, special consideration is required for wire-like foreign bodies,” said urologist Professor Toshiki Kijima, so his team used the scan to generate a 3D model of the rope to enable them to plan its removal. As a result, they were able to pull it out through a small incision in the man’s abdomen, extracting 230cm (7.5ft) of rope without damaging his urethra or bladder.

Commenting on the case, urology professor Giulio Garaffa said “In my 20 years’ experience in this field I have encountered a number of patients who perform this practice. However, a 230cm length object has to be one of the most extreme cases.” *dailymail.co.uk, 14 Nov 2022.*

● Doctors at the Krung Thai hospital in Pak Kret, Thailand, found themselves unable to help a 35-year-old man who needed to have a metal ring removed from his testicles. He had placed the ring there more than four years previously in a failed attempt to increase the length of his penis and then found he couldn’t take it off. Instead, the medics called in the rescue services, who used metal-cutting equipment in an hour-long operation to carefully remove the ring. The man suffered no permanent damage from either his four years with the ring or the operation to remove it and was expected to fully recover. *aseannow.com, 3 Oct 2022.*

● Responding rather more promptly to the problem was a 38-year-old Indonesian man who went to hospital with “severe penile pain” and swelling after having a metal ring stuck on his penis for 10 hours. He admitted that it got stuck during “an experiment with friends” and said that initially he had been able to slip it on and off easily, but it then got stuck and his penis began to hurt and, while he could still urinate, it hurt to do so. The team at Dr Soetomo General Academic Teaching Hospital in Surabaya used an electric grinder to remove the ring, slipping a metal plate between the ring and the man’s penis and spraying it continuously with saline solution to protect it from heat during the procedure. Writing the case up in the journal *Urology Case*

*Reports*, the doctors said that “penile strangulation” lasting for more than 30 minutes can cause irreversible damage, and can ultimately lead to gangrene, requiring amputation. *dailymail.co.uk, 16 Sept 2022.*

● Sarah Button, 23, says she has rarely experienced problems with airport security while travelling the world with a butt plug containing a former boyfriend’s ashes in place. Her boyfriend had given her the plug, engraved with the word “forever” while still alive. “The intention was initially a joke because he’d spent so much time in there and it was his favourite place,” said Button, but after he died she filled it with his ashes and travelled the world. As a result, they had gone to “places they only ever dreamed of going”. Concerned about awkward questions if it was found in her hand luggage, Button said: “I just left it within, hoping to avoid explanations.”

But the United Arab Emirates (UAE) proved more of a problem than most places. “I explained what it was, but there was a lady worker in earshot of that conversation and the male officials did not like the vulgarity I was using to explain,” she said. “They took me and my friend aside without much explanation.” After that, “a big official came and had us sign a super long foreign document and said if we went outside of the airport doors we’d go to jail,” giving her a life ban from visiting the gulf states. *metro.co.uk, 11 Nov 2022.*

## SIDELINES

### POLITE BEAR

Christopher Kinson, 54, a night shift cashier at a 7-Eleven in Olym-pic Valley, California, was initially horrified when a huge brown bear walked into the store, but relaxed when he realised the bear had just taken one candy bar and walked out. It returned several more times for candy, leaving the shop each time to eat its swag. “It’s like it was purposely polite to take one candy bar at a time – it’s almost like it had manners,” said Kinson. *mirror.co.uk, 14 Sept 2022.*

### NSFW WRECK

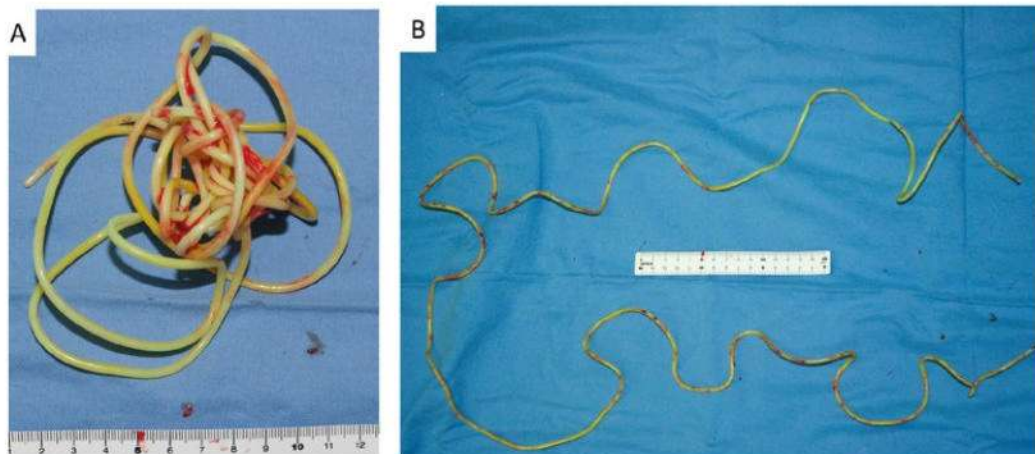
Oklahoma’s interstate highway 40 was closed for several hours after a collision between a truck and a van resulted in an unusual spillage on the road. A helicopter news team reporting on the wreck, which was near “a major adult-product-focused distribution hub”, were initially unclear what was spilling from the truck, but after zooming in on the packages the reporter said, “that sure looks like a bunch of vibrator boxes and tubes of lube scattered over the highway”, adding “whatever it is, it’s gonna take a while to clean up.” *independent.co.uk, 17 Sept 2022.*

### NSFW SWEETS

The far-right Alternative for Germany party attracted an amused response to sweets they handed out during an election campaign in Lower Saxony. The bright red gummy sweets were meant to represent the party’s swoosh-like arrow logo, but most people were struck by their startling resemblance to a dildo, resulting in many amused comments on social media. “Everybody sees what they want to see,” said a party spokesperson. *apnews.com, 15 Sept 2022.*

### MONKEY MESS-UP

A mission to capture a stray macaque monkey near Fujikawa Station in Fuji City, Japan, went badly wrong when one of the animal control team accidentally fired a tranquilliser dart while interviewing the woman who had reported the animal, hitting her in the arm. This knocked her out instantly and dosed her with enough tranquilliser to keep her under for an hour. In the confusion, the monkey made its escape and remains at large. *nypost.com, 30 Aug 2022.*



ABOVE: The possibly record-breaking 230cm (7.5ft) skipping rope that a Japanese man had managed to insert into his urethra.





## SIDELINES...

### COLD DOG SOUP

After a woman in Goiás, Brazil, searching for her missing Shih Tzu dog, heard yelping coming from her 44-year-old neighbour's, she called police who searched the man's house. They found a number of cats and dogs and, according to a Civil Guard spokesman, "there were some animals in the pot on an improvised stove", leading to his arrest for animal cruelty. *Metro*, 15 Aug 2022.

### FROG WEDDING

Faced with a record heatwave and no rain, Radhakant Verma from Gorakhpur, India, turned to a traditional solution and organised a frog wedding. His group found two frogs and staged a wedding ceremony for them on 19 July, watched by hundreds of locals, and then hosted a celebratory meal. The next day the India Meteorological Department forecast heavy rain for the area. *D.Star*, 20 July 2022.

### BUM RAP

Responding to reports of gunshots, police in San Antonio, Texas, found a 31-year-old man with a gunshot wound in his buttock and after taking witness statements determined that he had accidentally shot himself after firing a volley into the air. They also found he was wanted on multiple outstanding warrants and placed him under arrest. *ksat.com*, 11 Sept 2022.

### FOOTING THE BILL

A man who had his leg amputated at Bidasoa Hospital in Hondarribia, Spain, was threatened with a bill for £1,300 for its cremation, plus a £400 fine, if he did not come and pick it up and dispose of it; but Carmen Flores, the president of the Spanish Patient Advocate Association, said the charge was "ethically reprehensible". *dailymail.co.uk*, 12 Sept 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

## KEPT CORPSES

Failed resurrections, mummy murders and illegal human remains for sale



ABOVE: Some of the mummified corpses found in a 'ritual shrine' in Nigeria. BELOW: Christine Lee.

### BENIN MUMMIES

Police raiding a "suspected ritual shrine", in Benin City, southern Nigeria, found 20 mummified bodies being kept in the building. "Fifteen mummified male corpses, three mummified female corpses and two mummified children's corpses were discovered at the scene," said Jennifer Iwegbu, a police spokesperson. Nigerian police have periodically discovered similar shrines containing mummified bodies relating to a cult known as Alusi Okija. They are alleged to practice a ritual to settle disputes, often over business deals, where those involved are exhorted to drink a potion they are told will kill only the guilty. Originally intended to deter crime, it is claimed the cult has become a way for priests and their collaborators to kill and defraud people. It is not clear how long the bodies had been kept in the building, but police were interrogating three suspects they had captured and were searching for others who had fled the scene. *theguardian.com*, 18 Aug 2022.

### SALT RESURRECTION

When a 10-year-old boy named Suresh drowned while swimming in a pond in the village of Ballari in Karnataka, India, his parents followed the recommendations of social media posts that said that if the body of a drowned person is packed

### Neighbours had not seen her and assumed she had passed away

in salt for five hours, they will come back to life. A relative of the boy, Thippeswamy Reddy, said: "We bought around 10 kg (22lb) of salt, packed the body and waited for six hours, but nothing happened." Villagers informed the police and doctors, who declared the boy dead, and he was later cremated. *newindianexpress.com*, 7 Sept 2022.

### BATH BODY

Police responding to a burglary in Bullhead City, Arizona, found 65-year-old Christine Lee Walters rummaging through the house and arrested her. She was found to have been frequently returning to the property and taking the owner's purses, bags, and clothing to sell online. They also found the body of the homeowner, 60-year-old Wendy Mica, mummified in the

bath. It was not immediately clear when or how she had died, although neighbours said they had not seen her in a year and had assumed she had moved away. Walters denied knowing there was a body in the bath, but on searching her home they found Mica's birth certificate, tax paperwork, driver's license, and credit cards, as well as drug paraphernalia and "a useable amount of methamphetamine" and arrested her on burglary and drug charges. *foxnews.com*, 23 Oct 2022.

### DEAD DAD

After Randall Freer, 63, collapsed and died in Jackson, California, police visited his home to inform relatives of his death. The deputy initially thought there was no one at home, but hearing the sound of a fan, he peered in through the window and saw a corpse sitting in a reclining chair. After gaining entry to the house, police identified the body as belonging to Randall's father, Ada Clinton Freer, 91. The level of decomposition suggested that he'd been

dead for at least three years, which also meant that it was impossible to determine the cause of death, although there were no obvious signs of foul play. County coroner Kevin Reggio said that the last time



BULLHEAD CITY POLICE





## SIDELINES...

### SNAKE VS CENTIPEDE

Zoologists recorded a sighting of North America's rarest snake, the rim crowned rock snake, for the first time in four years in February. The tiny snake lives in a small area of Florida and is highly elusive. This one, though, was easy to spot: a hiker found it dead having choked to death on a giant centipede a third of its own length. Herpetologist Coleman Sheehy said: "It's extremely rare to find specimens that died while eating prey, and given how rare this species is, I would never have predicted finding something like this. We were flabbergasted." *msn.com, 7 Sept 2022.*

### NON-STANDARD STANDARD

Since 1970, most of the world's organisations responsible for setting universal worldwide standards such as the kilogram or length of a second have celebrated World Standards Day on the same day. All except the US, where the American National Standards Institute has always celebrated it on a different day. *New Scientist, 17 Sept 2022.*

### BAFFLING BLOOD

Police in Silver Spring Township, Pennsylvania, were baffled by a large pool of blood, measuring 4ft by 7ft (1.2m by 2.1m) that appeared in the car park of a local retirement home overnight. Forensics confirmed the blood was human, but everyone in the retirement home was accounted for, the local hospital hadn't seen anyone who had lost that amount of blood, and, despite intensive searches, no body was found. "All we can say... is a very serious injury occurred," said police Chief Chris Raubenstine. *kansascity.com, 1 Sept 2022.*

### GOOD DOG SPOT

A dog named Spot alerted his owner to a man in Sydney, Australia, who was jammed head-first in a septic tank on his property. Spot's owner called emergency services who extracted the man before rising water levels endangered him. An ambulance spokesman said, "Had the dog not heard the man's cries, it might not have been such a good ending." *D.Telegraph (Sydney), 21 Apr 2022.*



ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT: A happy Jeremy Lee Pauley and some of the bones he was offering for sale. ABOVE: David Pirtle.

the man had cashed a cheque in person was in 2016, but his son had access to his father's bank accounts and had continued to use them until his own death. "The son assumed the dad's identity, and I suspect that he was probably living with his dad and living off his father," Reggio said. "If the son was still alive, the guy would still be sitting there, basically." *latimes.com, 18 Aug 2022.*

### RANCID ROOMMATE

Whenever family members tried to contact Kevin Olson, 63, who lived in Chico, California, his housemate David Pirtle, 57, always fobbed them off with an excuse. Eventually, desperate to make contact, they reported the situation to police. Searching the property, officers found Olson's body, which had been lying in the house for at least four years. They also discovered that Pirtle had continued to make payments on Olson's

mortgage and had forged 50 cheques transferring money from Olson's account to his own. The level of decomposition of the body meant it was impossible to immediately determine the cause of death, but Pirtle was arrested on multiple charges of forgery and theft. *mirror.co.uk, 28 Sept 2022.*

### BITS IN BUCKETS

Jeremy Lee Pauley, 40, of Enola, Pennsylvania, was arrested after he was found to be selling human body parts on Facebook Marketplace. On a page under his name, he posted pictures of bags and stacks of femurs, captioned "Picked up more medical bones to sort through". In Marketplace he had a page under the title "The Grand Wunderkammer," described as "Vendors of the odd and unusual, museum exhibits, guest lectures, live entertainment, and so much more! Strange, curious, and unique in every way

possible!" Police initially found that, despite their macabre nature, the items he was trading were older human remains, including full skeletons, that had been legally obtained. Later though, they were tipped off about other items in his possession, and when they returned to Pauley's home they found three five-gallon (23l) buckets containing assorted body parts in preservative, including some from children. They discovered that he had been illegally buying human remains that had originated at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and had been sent to a mortuary for cremation, where an attendant had stolen them and sold them to Pauley for \$4,000. "I think I've seen it all, and then something like this comes around," said Sean McCormack, district attorney for Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. *[AP] 19 Aug 2022.*





## SIDELINES...

### MONK MAYHEM

Thai Buddhist monk Phra Thanakorn, 63, risks being expelled from his order for begging, drunkenness and law-breaking after being pulled over while driving around demanding money from people and "causing mayhem". Thanakorn explained that his behaviour was a result of drinking two shots of 40% proof rice whiskey mixed with lemon to "avoid catching Covid". *D.Star*, 22 Jul 2022.

### FUNERAL FEUD

A funeral in Richmond, California, ended in chaos after up to 20 armed family members brawled at the graveside. One relative attempted to run another over with a car, damaging the grass, knocking over headstones and vases and breaking a water main that flooded the plot. The deceased's casket was also knocked over in the fracas, but the body did not fall out. "We sometimes get family disputes at the cemetery. This one went above and beyond... in this case it looked like they had some really bad blood," said a police spokesperson. *sfgate.com*, 11 Aug 2022.

### TOILET TERROR

Florida resident Bruce Bleyer is apprehensive about using his loo after finding iguanas in the toilet bowl three times in a year, including twice in one week. Harold Rondan of Iguana Lifestyles, who had removed the lizards for Bleyer, said it was a mystery how they were gaining access to his loo. "We know it's not the vents... We looked for a little open sewer line around the house. We haven't found one." Bleyer said: "After the first time, I said I would never sit down without looking – now I'm not sure if I'll ever sit down again." *[UPI]* 14 July 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

## GRAVE CONCERNS | Stubbornly incorruptible corpses and a dead man walking



CEMITERIO MUNICIPAL DE BRAGA

ABOVE: The Cemetery of Monte d'Arcos, Braga, Portugal, where Angela Silva Bessa (pictured at bottom) found a mummification mystery. BELOW: Senai assemblyman Wong Bor Yang (left) with the legally dead Low Choo Choon.

### PORTUGUESE PUTREFACTION

In Portugal, human bodies are refusing to decay after burial. Since the 1960s, when shortage of cemetery space became a problem, Portuguese graveyards have worked on the basis of temporary graves. A corpse is buried and left for two years to decompose, after which it is dug up and the skeletal remains packed into a smaller container and reburied. Any corpse that still has soft tissue on it has to be buried for a further two years, after which it is exhumed again and checked; the process repeats every two years until the remains are skeletonised. Repeat exhumations used to be rare, but a survey of burials in Porto found that between 55 and 64 per cent of bodies dug up between 2006 and 2015 were not fully decomposed and had to be reinterred. Some corpses now end up being repeatedly dug up and reburied, taking decades to reach their eternal repose, which can be very distressing for their families. Increasingly, bodies are found to be mummifying, which makes the process effectively endless. Bodies naturally

### Some corpses end up being repeatedly dug up and reburied

mummify when they dry so quickly that decomposition stops, usually due to being buried in conditions of extreme heat or cold, but this is not the case under normal graveyard conditions in temperate climates, so it is not clear why it is happening in Portugal. Angela Silva Bessa has been studying the anomalous decomposition for her PhD thesis, collecting samples from the soil and bodies, but remains mystified. "I honestly thought I would at least find a relation between the soil properties and the state of the composition of the body," she said, "and I didn't." She is now moving on to consider whether smoking or medicines taken while alive might influence the process. Tristan Krap, a forensic scientist from the Netherlands, says that he is not surprised that bodies haven't decomposed after two years, and would expect it to take around

five, but admits the process of decomposition of bodies in normal graves has not been well studied. *sciencealert.com*, 4 Nov 2022.



### DEATH SURPRISE

Malaysian hearse driver Low Choo Choon, 71, tried to make a police report about a deed to a grave site he owned that had gone missing, but was told that this was not possible, as he was already registered as dead. Since then, his deceased status has caused him problems when renewing his road tax certificate and made it difficult for him to vote while he tries to get the National Registration Department to revoke his "death". "I have been working at a funeral home for many years, but I never thought that I would be listed as 'dead'" he said. *ladbible.com*, 10 Aug 2022.





# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

**NOEL ROONEY** finds that being a cryptocurrency tycoon has become a hazardous business of late, with three high-profile deaths in just a few days...

## THE 'CURSE OF CRYPTO'

The attrition rate for cryptocurrency tycoons has recently spiked somewhat, and the news has set antennæ quivering in the Conspirasphere. This lethal uptick cannot easily be put down to the law of large numbers; crypto-tycoons are mortal, just like the rest of us, of course, but since the current population of crypto-billionaires is (according to Forbes) a mere 19, the deaths of three high-profile figures in a few days is perhaps cause for concern. At the very least, it might suggest (as per the gleeful *Metro* headline: "The Curse of Crypto") that crypto-mining has its own rather specific health hazards.

Our first victim was not personally a billionaire, but the company he helped to found was recently valued at three billion dollars. Tiantian Kullander apparently died in his sleep on 23 November. At 30 years old, he wasn't the most obvious contender for cot death, or its senescent equivalent, and in any case, currently all sudden deaths have only one obvious cause in the C-sphere: the evil vaccine. So the unfortunate Mr Kullander has to go down as an odd sort of casualty: implicated in one conspiracy theory but killed by another.

Vyacheslav Taran was very definitely a crypto-billionaire; he lived in Monaco and travelled by helicopter to prove it. Helicopters, as regular observers of the C-sphere will know, are a terminally risky mode of transport for a certain type of person; a person, say, who has fallen foul of The Powers That Be, for instance. So perhaps it's no surprise that Taran met his maker in a helicopter crash; or that the circumstances of the crash are seen by many (including mainstream media outlets) as suspicious.

Reports immediately after



*"They are going to frame me... They will torture me to death"*

the crash claimed that another passenger had been booked on the flight but cancelled at the last minute; and a last-minute cancellation before a crash is a trope that just begs for a theory. The crash also allegedly happened in clear weather – another dog whistle for enquiring minds. And there's more, according to the *Daily Mail*: a Ukrainian news agency, UNIAN, claimed (without any evidence, as the *Mail* is quick to point out) that Taran had links with Russian intelligence and laundered funds for them via crypto accounts.

Pots, kettles and dark hues might come to mind for those who have alleged that Sam Bankman Fried – an ex-crypto billionaire who seems to have escaped with his life, for now – used his company to launder funds for the Ukrainian government, or the personal and ill-gotten fortune of President Zelenskyy, as others have preferred it. But hey, in the strange confluence of dodgy financial streams that dominates the world of contemporary money, it's perhaps no shock that some of the more singular currents should find themselves

mixing on occasion.

And then there was Nikolai Mushegian. The 29-year-old Mushegian was found, drowned, in the waters off the coast of Puerto Rico, a country that has become something of a haven for folks in the crypto community. In the days leading up to his death on 28 October, he posted some passing strange tweets. Just hours before his body was found, he tweeted, "CIA and Mossad and pedo [sic] elite are running some kind of sex trafficking entrapment blackmail ring out of Puerto Rico and Caribbean islands. They are going to frame me with a laptop planted by my ex who was a spy. They will torture me to death."

Shades of John McAfee, one might think; except poor Mr Mushegian didn't have time to get a tattoo. Instead, he was found less than five hours later, fully dressed, wallet still in pocket (I assume this is the traditional analogue, non-crypto type of wallet), floating in an area of water well-known for its dangerous riptides. The Puerto Rican crypto folk were divided on the circumstances of his death; some thought it an obvious suicide, but others were convinced that foul play was involved. There was no such division in the C-sphere; the unanimous verdict was death by Deep State.

Multiple deaths in a single category (say, pop stars at age 27) are not new. They represent what some observers (Loren Coleman prominent among them) call a 'cluster phenomenon'; a numerical coincidence with a subtle tinge of strangeness. For conspiracists, however, the word (and concept) 'coincidence' is anathema; a flaky cop-out at best, a weapon of mass distraction at worst. They are dots and they need to be joined. And coming, as they did, hot on the heels of the FTX debacle, these deaths, all with

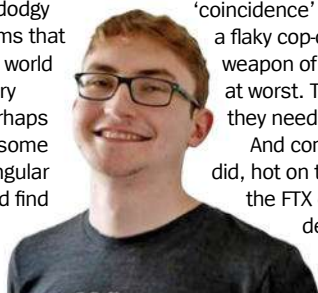
**BELOW:** Paranoid crypto 'visionary' Nikolai Mushegian, dead at 29.

just enough uncertainty about them to allow space for speculation, have focused a lot of conspiracist minds on the world of crypto. Is there some larger conspiracy afoot? Is it relevant that several countries have recently launched digital currencies? Did that gambit necessitate the removal of a few top honchos in the world of crypto, a currency untethered to any state, just to concentrate a few minds and prepare the ground for a grand takeover?

Mushegian certainly spoke to this broader conspiracy theory. He regularly tweeted about the "central banking cartel", which uses, he claimed, "debt and blackmail" to achieve its nefarious ends. In this respect, his fatal trajectory followed that of McAfee, and perhaps that is enough to suggest that his death, perhaps more than the others, might have something suspicious about it. On the other hand, his well-documented mental health problems, and the prodigious amount of weed that he apparently smoked, might suggest another story, equally tragic but less appealing to a particular frame of mind.

The curse of crypto may yet turn out to be a thing; elite paedophilia, high finance, CIA, Mossad – and helicopters – make for a heady brew. And jesting Pilate may be the arbiter.

[www.msn.com/en-gb/news/news/uk/cryptocurrency/tiantian-kullander-found-dead-in-his-sleep-aged-30/ar-AA14EIPj](https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/news/uk/cryptocurrency/tiantian-kullander-found-dead-in-his-sleep-aged-30/ar-AA14EIPj); [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11480711/Russian-billionaire-53-killed-helicopter-crash-near-Monaco-latest-crypto-mystery-death.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11480711/Russian-billionaire-53-killed-helicopter-crash-near-Monaco-latest-crypto-mystery-death.html); <https://nypost.com/2022/11/09/drowning-death-of-crypto-visionary-fuels-conspiracy-theories/>





PAUL DEVEREUX investigates tattooed mummies, Neanderthal cookery and an American vampire



ABOVE LEFT: Tattoos on the neck of one of two Egyptian mummies from Deir el-Medina. ABOVE RIGHT: The facial reconstruction and skull of the Griswold 'vampire'

## THE BES OF LUCK

Tattoos are fashionable these days, but they have an ancient pedigree in various functional contexts, one example being the finding of two researchers from U. Missouri (St Louis) and John Hopkins University. They have discovered tattoos on two female mummies that had been removed from their tombs in Deir el-Medina, Egypt (an active town 1550-1070 BC). One of the mummies was unwrapped, the other wrapped. A tattoo could be made out on the mummified skin of the exposed mummy representing a bowl, a purification ritual and a depiction of the Egyptian deity Bes, protector of women, especially in childbirth. The other mummy had a tattoo also dedicated to Bes, which was visible using infrared photography. This was part of a complex of other images including a zigzag line thought to represent a marsh – where people would go to cool themselves and also to ease pain. Clay figurines found at the site also had representations of tattoos of Bes on the lower back and upper thighs. So, tattoos were clearly being used well over 3,000 years ago in an apotropaic capacity rather than for fashion. *Phys.org*, 11 Nov 2022. Original paper in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 11 Oct. 2022. DOI: 10.1177/03075133221130089

## NOT CADBURYS

The origins of cacao usage as chocolate go back not to Central American cultures like the Maya and Aztec, as is often thought, but further south and considerably earlier to the Ecuadorian Amazon. Archaeologists have relatively recently been uncovering evidence there of a little-known people they have called 'Mayo Chinchipe Marañón', who were active c.5,500 years ago. They were accomplished

ceramicists and builders – for example, they constructed a domestic and ceremonial complex at the junction of two rivers, where French and Ecuadorian scientists have found the earliest known evidence of both ritual and domestic use of chocolate. It was first used in liquid form, probably as a soup or beverage – even a beer – but what was a surprise is clear evidence of it also being used as *medicine*. These Amazonian people were obviously aware that raw chocolate does have anti-inflammatory and other valuable medicinal properties. Over succeeding centuries, knowledge of the magical substance spread north to Central America, probably in the form of trade and currency. *BBC Reel*, 1 Nov 2022.

## HEAD SCRATCHER

The first known sentence in Canaanite, the earliest known alphabet, has been deciphered on, of all things, an ivory head-lice comb almost four millennia old. It was unearthed in Lachish, Israel (ancient kingdom of Judah), in 2017, but the lightly inscribed writing was so worn down and smoothed over time it was only noticed recently. What does this rare voice from across the ages say? "May this tusk root out the lice of the hair and the beard." We hope it did the job. *Times*, 9 Nov 2022.

## BON APPETIT

The common image of what Neanderthals ate usually boils down to ideas of a pretty basic meat diet, but now scientists analysing carbonised leftovers from c.70,000-year-old meals in Shanidar Cave north of Baghdad and Franchthi Cave in southern Greece have come up with a challenge to that assumption, finding selective use of plants and their skilful preparation for diverse types of meals. "Our

findings are the first real indication of complex cooking – and thus of food culture – among Neanderthals," states Chris Hunt, a professor of cultural palaeoecology at Liverpool John Moores University, who coordinated the excavation. Additional to meat, wild nuts and grasses were often combined with pulses, such as lentils, and wild mustard. The evidence showed that the Neanderthals – and Early Modern humans – soaked pulses and seeds, then softened them by pounding them, presumably with rocks. Hunt said: "Because the Neanderthals had no pots, we presume that they soaked their seeds in a fold of an animal skin." The researchers recreated one of the Shanidar recipes and found that it made a kind of flatbread, which "was really very palatable" and had a nutty taste, if a bit gritty. *Guardian*, 23 Nov. 2022. Original paper in *Antiquity*: <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.143>

## AN AMERICAN VAMPIRE

It was not only in deepest darkest mediæval Europe that people considered 'different' for one reason or another were labelled as being 'vampires', but in America too. One such poor fellow was buried in the late 18th century in Griswold, Connecticut, with his femur bones arranged in a criss-cross manner – a placement indicating that he was considered to be a vampire and to prevent him walking after death as a revenant. Now, using DNA analysis, forensic scientists from Parabon Nanolabs and the US Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory have ascertained he was around 55 years old and suffered from tuberculosis. Moreover, using the dimensions of his skull, they have been able to reconstruct his facial appearance. *Live Science*, 3 Nov 2022.





# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 279: THE JEWRY IS IN

This is a wider-ranging sequel to my previous assemblage [FT246:19] of strange military items culled from the *Jewish Wars* of Josephus.

It has much profited from Frederic Raphael's (Jewish classicist-novelist-screenplay writer – an Oscar for his *Darling*) *A Jew Amongst Romans: The Life and Legacy of Flavius Josephus* (Pantheon Books, 2018), which at once puts all rivals in the shade. Raphael is lavish with English quotations. Best full translation is GM Williamson's Penguin (2nd ed. rev. Mary Smallwood, 1981).

For fictional supplement, there is the Josephus trilogy by Leon Feuchtwanger, himself forced out of Germany in 1933 by the Nazis.

Quick recap of the man. Born AD 37 (death date unknown) to a priestly father and mother with royal pretensions, he was one of the resistance leaders in the Jewish-Roman War (AD 66-73), surrendering to Vespasian after the 47-day siege of hill town Jotapata, thereby dishonouring a mutual suicide pact. After helping Vespasian's son, future emperor Titus, in mopping-up operations, he ended up in Rome as propagandist for the regime, writing (in Greek, not Latin) the four books from which most of the present information is culled: *Autobiography*; *Against Apion* (polemic against an Alexandrian Greek); *Antiquities of the Jews*; *The Jewish Wars*.

A word on the totemic Masada, its topography similar to Jotapata's. Josephus describes the suicide pact involving 960 persons. However, archaeologist Kenneth Atkinson (in *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers, 2007, p397) disbelieves this because of the absence of any mass grave(s). Raphael (p159) is bothered by this; other archaeologists put more faith in Josephus.

Raphael gets us off to a good start by observing that one of the 613 ordinances (see website listings of the whole lot) buttressing the Torah specified that Yahweh is offended if a man breaks wind without uncovering his head.

Nice to think that God is as attentive to individual farts as he is to the hymnal "meanest sparrow falling in the street". In a previous column [FT192:17], I dwelt on this malodorous subject, observing ancient evidence for religious apotropaic farts, even the possibility of a deified one.

While the Roman poet Horace will have

known or cared nothing about the Torah, it is striking that (*Satires* 1. 9. 70) when discussing insults against them, he calls it "Farting at the circumcised Jews."

Horace also says of an improbability, "Let Apella the Jew believe that" (= Tell It To The Marines). Raphael (see related websites) mentions the greater credulity of mediaeval beliefs that Jewish men menstruated. Of the many circumcision jokes ('Unkindest Cut of All' and so on), first prize must go to David Lloyd George on philosopher Herbert Samuel: "When they circumcised him, they threw away the wrong bit."

In anatomical reversal, a Roman soldier angered by a milling crowd of festive Jews exposed his bare bottom to them, adding verbal insults. This provoked a riot in which 30,000 were crushed to death, making this both the first recorded 'mooning' and the most lethal.

Another pogrom was caused in Alexandria where local Greeks mocked the Jews by setting up a factory next to the synagogue and besmirching the narrow access with the blood of a chicken slaughtered over a chamber-pot – fowl play indeed...

Whenever a Herod enters the scene, lurid atrocities are never far behind. Having made his future wife Mariamne's brother Aristobulus High Priest, Herod, fearing his popularity might lead to insurrection, invited him to a swimming party and had him drowned.

Before marrying Mariamne, Herod secretly ordered his sister Salome's brother Joseph to kill her if anything happened to himself, to prevent a subsequent marriage. One night, after some love-making, Herod swore she was his only love. Mariamne retorted, "And a fine way you showed it, telling Joseph to kill me." Not the right answer: he strangled her, albeit later trying to apologise through séances with her spirit, this remorse somewhat nullified by his subsequent marriage to a second Mariamne and execution of mother Alexandra, overall adding to his tally by liquidating virtually all the sons by his

nine wives.

As Herodian tailpiece, whilst in Parthian custody, his brother Phasael killed himself by smashing head against rock, whilst his ally Hyrcanus had his ears lopped off to render him ineligible for High Priest – Byzantines would later use blinding as a disqualifying mutilation.

Josephus himself had many hair-

raising moments. Once, he was on a ship that foundered, compelling the passengers to swim all night for safety. As Raphael (p40) asks: "Had his workouts with Bannus (sc. his personal trainer in survival tactics) been based on a Græco-Roman curriculum, including marathon swimming?"

For a while, Josephus evaded Roman efforts to capture him in Jotapata by jumping into a pit adjoining a cave invisible at ground level. This was "thanks to some

divine providence". Such supernatural connections also enabled him to come up with various useful prophetic dreams and predictions.

Apart from suicide pacts at Jotapata and Masada, there runs throughout his *Jewish Wars* a sad refrain of cornered Jews flinging their wives and children down steep cliffs before leaping after them. When faced with violence from dissenting Jews, Josephus impressively won them over by jumping from a house window, his black clothes torn, covered with cinders, a sword hanging from his neck.

Josephus had his darker side, not restricted to breaking 'sacred' suicide pacts. To punish Clitus, leader of an uprising at Tiberias, he ordered both his hands be cut off, threatening to do the amputation himself. Clitus begged to be allowed to keep one hand. Josephus agreed, on condition that Clitus himself perform the operation – which he did.

Space is running out, hence I refer readers back to my previously mentioned FT pieces for much more, here just resurrecting the most lurid:

A certain Mary killed, roasted, and ate half her baby, offering the remainder to hungry warriors, saying, "If you disapprove, leave it for me" – they did.





## EXHIBITION REPORT

## STRANGE PHENOMENA ON THE LEFT BANK

A fascinating new exhibition in Paris, *Phenomena: The Unexplained in The Face of Science*, collects a wide range of rare material and reveals the differences between British and French views of the paranormal says **IAN SIMMONS**.



LEFT: The exhibition focuses on 19th and 20th century investigations into strange phenomena and is housed in a galleried and wood panelled room that dates back to 1905. BELOW LEFT: A 'steampunk' crystal dowsing device made by artist and healer Marc Cohen.

The Museum of the History of Medicine is not one of Paris's higher profile museums, tucked away deep in the Paris Descartes University on the Left Bank and only open for a few hours in the afternoon, but it is one of the most beguiling. Housed in a long, galleried, wood-panelled room built in 1905, it is home to one of the oldest medical collections in Europe. This was founded in the 18th century and includes all kinds of historic medical implements, some of them rather fearsome, such as a giant Wimshurst machine that was used to generate static electricity for electric shock treatments in the days before mains electricity. Now, as part of the PhotoSaintGermain festival, the museum is hosting *Phenomena: The Unexplained in The Face of Science*, an exhibition of photographs relating to paranormal phenomena. This has been put together after extensive research by radio producer and forteran Philippe

### Durville is attempting to mummify a foetus using his own "radiant influence"



Baudouin and is intended to be in dialogue with the museum's permanent collection, with which it shares a space. It features images that Baudouin has sourced from institutional and private collections, largely in France, although there are also contributions from Romania, Hungary and the UK. These focus on investigations into strange phenomena carried out largely between the mid-19th and late 20th century by members of the scientific and medical establishment, but whose work is mostly ignored or dismissed by that establishment today. As a result, the exhibition contains many photographs that would not be familiar to British audiences, and indeed, many that will be unfamiliar to French audiences as well.

The exhibition reveals differences between the British and French view of the paranormal over this period; for example, there is a section devoted to "animal magnetism"

and human electricity of the kind that Mesmer promoted in the late 18th century. In the UK, interest in this largely died out in the 19th century as mesmerism became synonymous with hypnosis in most people's minds, but it is clear that in France this remained a prominent area of interest for researchers and as a result the exhibition includes some wonderful images relating to the phenomenon. Among these is a slightly startling photo of the rather dapper Henri Durville, a leading human magnetism researcher, dressed in a sharp suit and holding his hand over an object in a dish at which he is staring with obvious concentration. The object, it turns out, is a foetus, which Durville is attempting to mummify using his own "radiant influence". Whether he was successful is unknown, but there is a splendidly macabre photo of a severed hand allegedly mummified by the same process next to it, as well as a spectacular photo of "human electricity" being thrown off by a subject.

Another area where French researchers seem to have done significant, but overlooked, work is "dermo-optic perception", or skin vision, which Yvonne Duplessis explored experimentally in the 1970s; the exhibition features photographs of her experiments, in which a number of children believed capable of this feat are being tested with Zenner cards in various contraptions. Duplessis's work recurs throughout the exhibition as she seems to have been both prolific and thorough





in documenting her activities. Baudouin was given access to her photographs by her family, enabling him to show many never seen before in public. Little known outside France, too, is the work of psychic detective Leon Couette, who utilised dowsing as part of his approach to solving crime, and was apparently well regarded by Paris police. As well as photos of the man at work, the exhibition also contains his dowsing pendulum, hat and other ephemera associated with the detective.

Further material from the Duplessis collection relates to bioenergetics, auras and Kirlian photography, and this section includes a beautiful “electrophotograph” of a hand taken by Romanian researcher Ioan Florin Dumitrescu, which Baudouin says is his favourite piece in the whole exhibition. These are accompanied by artworks created specially for this show – a kind of steampunk crystal dowsing device made by artist and healer Marc Cohen, and aura photographs by Dorothée Elisa Baumann. These were taken of early visitors to the exhibition using an Auracam, invented by American engineer Guy Coggins in the 1980s, and I regret missing the opportunity to have mine done.

The section on poltergeists is fascinating, as although it is the only topic to feature photos familiar to British audiences – from the Enfield case – it also has ones from several far less well-known French cases. These are more or less contemporary with Enfield and almost as spectacular, with an apport produced during one of these also on show. The Enfield pictures do act as a reminder, though, of Maurice Grosse’s marvellous moustache and 1970s flares; they don’t make paranormal investigators like that anymore! Baudouin has turned up pictures of a marvellous collection of apports gathered during séances with Lajos Pap in Hungary in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Pap regularly produced seeds, plants,



**ABOVE LEFT:** A display of artefacts connected to French psychic detective Leon Couette, including his dowsing pendulum and hat. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Magnetism researcher Henri Durville. **BELOW LEFT:** A collection of cutlery bent by young French followers of metal bender Uri Geller. **BELOW RIGHT:** Zenner cards and photographs of experiments from the Yvonne Duplessis collection.



insects and lizards during his sittings, even under the most stringent conditions. These were collected by the psychic researcher Elemér Chengery Pap (no relation, apparently) who created an apport museum in Budapest to house them all. Unfortunately, the museum was completely destroyed during WWII and none of the apports survive, so these photos are all that is left as evidence of Lajos Pap’s prodigious talents.

There is also some fascinating video, which as well as showing familiar film of Soviet psychic Nina Kulagina, has some lesser-known footage of Eleonore Zugun, who gained notoriety in the 1920s for being able to manifest bite marks, weals and other wounds on her skin, as well as generating more familiar poltergeist activity. Of course, no psychic phenomena exhibition would be complete without the inevitable Uri Geller, who

is indeed present and correct, but for a change playing second fiddle to a selection of French “mini-Gellers”; children who, in the 1970s, manifested similar skills after seeing him on TV. Baudouin has tracked some of these down and has photos of them in action back in their heyday, along with a selection of mangled silverware they had distorted, some of which would have required significant effort to wreck if they were faking it and bending them by hand.

Having curated the fortean exhibition *Of Monsters and Miracles* at Croydon Clocktower back in 1995, I know how difficult it is to persuade museums to present this kind of material – so kudos to The Museum of the History of Medicine sticking its neck out and giving this show space. It is a deeply researched and well considered exploration of a complex topic that contributes



to scholarship in the field by bringing to light many previously unknown photos and is a credit to all involved. It seems, too, that this is only the first part; there will be a follow-up show next year looking at other aspects of fortean phenomena, which will be accompanied by an extensive catalogue covering both exhibitions. It is definitely worth diverting to see this exhibition or its sequel if you find yourself near Paris (do check opening times first). All text is in French, but Google Lens now does a wonderful job of giving you some idea of what it all means.

**Phenomena: The Unexplained in the Face of Science runs until 28 Jan at Musée d'Histoire de la Médecine – Université Paris Cité, 12 rue de l'École de Médecine, 75006 Paris. Visit <https://u-paris.fr/bibliotheques/exposition-phenomenes-photosaintgermain/> for more information.**





## Haunted halls and Spiritualist circles

ALAN MURDIE heads to Northern Ireland to look at claims of paranormal activity old and new

Northern Ireland may currently be lacking a functioning devolved government – still suffering arguments about post-Brexit customs borders and having spent the autumn wrangling over postponed elections – but a wholly different cause of dispute arose in the province at Hallowe'en 2022. The cause was the distinguished Queen's University in Belfast being left out of what purported to be a national survey identifying the top 10 'most haunted universities' within the UK. Maureen Coleman writing in the *Belfast Telegraph* seized on this omission, declaring that Queen's University was being 'snubbed' in not even receiving a ranking in the survey, which was compiled by the Knowledge Academy, a US-based online training business registered in 2018 (*Belfast Telegraph*, 21 Oct 2022).

The Knowledge Academy survey derived its respective rankings for identifying the 'most haunted universities' from such criteria as the number of haunted listed buildings nearby, the alleged number of paranormal reports within two miles of each campus and – ludicrously – from counting local cemeteries and the number of gravestones within them. The totals were then crunched to distil a final 'spooky rating' with each university awarded a score out of 10. The University of Liverpool achieved first place, Bath University came second and York University was third. Absurdly, Liverpool John More University was ranked in fourth overall on account of there being 282,000 gravestones within a two-mile radius, giving it an 'exceptional' spooky score of 8.73.

Possibly this spurious survey was meant as a light-hearted Hallowe'en piece. If so, it fell rather flat when these quack statistics were solemnly recited in more than 50 newspapers across the UK, ranging from the *Hucknall Dispatch* to the *Stornoway Gazette* and all without a scintilla of critical comment. The only dissenter was the *Belfast Telegraph*, which saw fit to challenge the nonsensical methodology behind the survey, motivated by a perceived sense of injustice from it ignoring the iconic status given to Queen's University following the second series of the BBC Radio 4 podcast *Uncanny*, broadcast in autumn 2021. The *Uncanny* team investigation revealed a terrifying historic haunting focused on Room 6-11 inside the now-demolished Alanbrooke Hall of Residence at Queen's. Show presenter



ABOVE: The now-demolished Alanbrooke Hall of Residence at Queen's University, Belfast; in his *Uncanny* podcasts Danny Robins (inset) has cemented its reputation as the site of terrifying hauntings.

**“Queen’s isn’t just the most haunted university in the UK, but in the entire world”**

Danny Robins stated: “When we made that first episode of *Uncanny* about bedroom 6-11, it was undoubtedly one of the most significant hauntings we have covered.” He explained: “The more we dug, the more we discovered, and the witnesses just kept coming.” Particularly striking was testimony from a former student named Ken, now a geneticist, which was so terrifying it





**ABOVE LEFT:** Psychical researcher Dr William Jackson Crawford. **ABOVE CENTRE:** The Belfast medium Kathleen Goligher. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Goligher Spiritualist circle was studied by Crawford, who detailed his experiments in *The Reality of Psychic Phenomena*, from which this image of a Goligher séance is taken.

provoked Robins into exclaiming “Bloody hell Ken!” a phrase since incorporated on spin-off mugs, T-shirts and other series merchandise. Other witnesses recalled “strange and terrifying things going on”: lights switching on and off, lifts working by themselves, bizarre poltergeist activity, a sinister black ghostly figure described as “a force of nature”, and one man feeling himself being pushed from a window.

Listeners seem to have been suitably impressed, with the episode, broadcast in October 2021, achieving the highest audience ratings for the series. Consequently, Danny Robins happily offered support for Queen’s University stating: “From everything we were told, I’d say Queen’s isn’t just the most haunted university in the UK, but in the entire world.”

Although I consider the Knowledge Academy survey nonsense, I welcome it and the reaction provoked in Northern Ireland for two reasons. Firstly, it did mark a refreshing return to the supernatural at Hallowe’en as opposed to its degeneration into a humanist celebration, treated largely as a psychopathic Punch and Judy show and costume party for people with a bent for dressing as killer clowns or blood-spattered doctors and nurses. Secondly, the dispute was a reminder that there are many hauntings in Northern Ireland deserving attention and awaiting re-investigation.

Fifty years ago Andrew Green introduced a handful of Northern Irish entries in *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973) by referring to the province and its ‘troubled history’, which did indeed do much to dampen paranormal

investigation into local ghosts, diverting attention but certainly not discouraging belief. Ghosts remained present and active not only in Belfast but throughout the Six Counties. A great number were documented in a series of original and sensible books by local author Shelia St Clair from the 1980s onwards, and a few ghost hunting groups were quietly active, even if casting doubt on some claims.

For example, in October 1997 staff at Fernhill House (where Loyalist paramilitary leaders had previously declared their ceasefire in October 1994) were reporting doors opening and closing without any explanation as well as strange noises in the restaurant “as if someone has fallen down the stairs, but again no one is there when someone goes to look”. One visiting family claimed they had captured images of a Victorian woman waving at their camcorder. However, Barry Fitzgerald and members of the Northern Ireland Paranormal Research Association (NIPRA) investigated the site, but recorded nothing unusual. Fernhill House was later a museum for the Orange Order and is now derelict, but one wonders if there may be scope for future investigations. (*Daily Mirror*, 30 Oct 1997; Barry Fitzgerald personal comm. 3 Nov 2022). Altogether, a revisitation of such historic hauntings across Northern Ireland is well deserved, as the Queen’s University story shows.

Just over a century ago, Northern Ireland was the scene of an intriguing and mysterious series of ghostly experiments. This was in the days of encouraging ghosts to come to you rather than going out looking for them. Spiritualism then

was quite often a family affair and a popular after dinner amusement before the arrival of television and the Internet. The experimenter was Dr William Jackson Crawford, an engineer who studied the Goligher Spiritualist circle in Belfast, comprising the teenage medium Kathleen Goligher, five members of her family and a brother-in-law, all convinced believers.

In his book *The Reality of Psychic Phenomena* (1916) Crawford details 87 experiments, writing that, before beginning, he had seen the Golighers’ table floating in the air, off and on, for a period of over a year, “and often I had wondered if the reaction was on the floor immediately below the table, or if it was on the medium herself, or if it indeed was located in neither of these positions.” Using his mechanical knowledge Crawford set about solving the puzzle, becoming convinced the movements he recorded and the rapping sounds frequently heard were achieved by what he termed “unseen operators” in the form of physical rods projecting from the body of the medium.

The set-up and manifestations impressed physicist Sir William Barrett and a sceptical friend, a doctor, who visited the circle. They were surprised in finding tests were conducted in good light and when the séance table began moving and floating, they were admitted to the circle and tried to hold it down. “This both of us found it impossible to do,” Barrett reported. “It resisted our strongest efforts.” One of the most remarkable observations was the drop in weight of Kathleen Goligher when seated on a weighing machine while unexplained raps were being heard, with it





**LEFT:** Spofforth Castle, Yorkshire, where Project Reveal claims child spirits apparently enjoy pushing teddy bears off chairs.

discovered that the medium progressively lost weight as the rapping continued – some eight imperial pounds (3.6kg) in all.

On the cessation of the raps, her normal weight, as measured, returned. Crawford considered the intensity of the raps was directly proportional to weight loss, concluding: “the loss represents actual matter temporarily detached from the medium used in some manner in the production of raps, blows, etc.”

From this, Crawford formulated what he called ‘rod theory’ stating: “The rigidity of the psychic rod is due in some way to material particles temporarily projected from the medium.” It seemed as if the late 19th century favourite – ectoplasm – was on the point of proof.

Unfortunately the revelation never came, as Crawford’s investigations ended soon afterwards amid tragedy. Shortly after completing a book entitled *Psychic Structures*, but before its publication, Crawford committed suicide in July 1920. He had taken poison and was found dead on rocks at Bangor. It seems in the space of a few weeks he had been stricken by a complete and devastating mental collapse. Efforts were made to continue his research, but at the end of 1921 further investigation by the Irish physicist Dr Fournier d’Albe (1868-1933) raised strong suspicions of fraud. This and failure to replicate the most impressive findings posthumously marred Crawford’s reputation and encouraged the view that he killed himself because he was discovered cheating. The Goligher séances left an enigma; one is almost reminded of ghost hunter Andrew Green’s maxim

**“We have asked the spirit to let us know if it is there by touching some of the objects”**

for adolescents messing around with Ouija boards: “Begun in fun, continued in fraud and closed in fright” – save that the experiments had not been undertaken as a game.

Philosopher and parapsychologist Professor John Beloff looked into the Goligher circle again in the 1960s, succeeding in tracing Katherine Goligher and other surviving relatives, but discovered little to resolve the truth either way, beyond learning her mediumship declined after her marriage. It transpired experimental séances involving her continued until 1933, some using infra-red photography, but the records were destroyed in bombing during World War II. (See ‘WJ Crawford, his work in Psychokinesis’ by Allan Barham (1988) in *SPR Journal*, vol.55, 113-137).

Reviewing much of the astonishing evidence claimed in these and other séances between 1874 and 1945, and comparing them with physical manifestations reported in the run up to Hallowe’en 2022, it must be said that contemporary effects are rather meagre in comparison. John Beloff himself wondered if there was some grand long-term paranormal decline effect involved, to explain why such manifestations had

seemingly disappeared.

Take one recent story, “Moment ‘ghost’ knocks over toy bear as paranormal experts ask ‘are you watching us?’”, carried in the *Teeside Gazette* (14 Oct 2022).

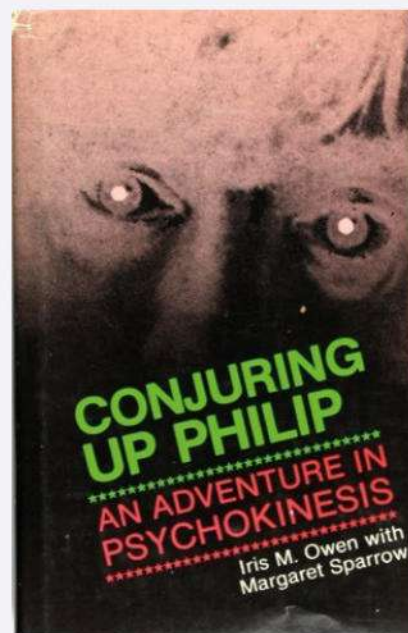
Linzi and Lee Steer of Rotherham were ghost hunting at Spofforth Castle, a ruined manor in Yorkshire, when they filmed a teddy bear put out to tempt the spirits unexpectedly falling from a chair. Explaining the context of the clip, the couple, who run Project Reveal: Ghosts of Britain, describe how at that point: “We have asked for the spirit to let us know it is there by touching some of the objects we have placed out.” At Spofforth they were using “small bears that light up, but only if something touches them”. They state: “We have encountered the bears being pushed over for no apparent reason... The bears always seem to be the one piece of equipment that always goes off.” Linzi, 53, and her husband Lee, 37, believe child spirits are responsible and that this offers proof of life after death.

Even if the effect is scarcely a patch on what old Spiritualist circles achieved, it is certainly very odd, presuming no normal causation. As ‘Prince of Ghost Hunters’ Harry Price (1881-1948) once observed, a matchbox moving a few inches without human agency or any known causation is just as significant as a regiment of ghosts parading down a staircase (*Harry Price: Biography of a Ghost Hunter* (1950) by Paul Tabori).

But I wonder if the answers lie not in spirits but with a group psychokinetic effect. Could what is really happening be a 21st century version of the Philip Experiment conducted in Toronto by parapsychologists Drs George and Iris Owen, and which marks its 50th anniversary over 2022-23?

Started in August 1972, the Philip Experiment demonstrated the potential for creating an artificial ghost from the unconscious minds of sitters and one capable of moving objects and making rapping noises. The New Horizons group of eight men and women originally met up for meditation sessions over a year where they tried visualising and creating an apparition. Meeting no success, they decided to change tack, imitating light-hearted Victorian table-turning séances to try and obtain raps. Questions were addressed to an imaginary ‘communicator’, Philip, whose ‘personality’ and ‘biography’ as a 17th century man (all quite fictional) were previously fixed by consensus prior to the start of the experiment.





**ABOVE:** In the 1970s the Philip Experiment group replicated Victorian séances to conjure up an imaginary ‘communicator’ called Philip – a sketch of whom is seen below – and were amazed when their fictional creation began producing real phenomena.

Philip’s invented pseudo-biography imagined him as a married aristocratic Englishman living at a place called Diddington Manor (a real place in Warwickshire) in the mid-17th century. He commenced an affair with a beautiful dark-eyed raven-haired gypsy girl, ‘Margo’. When his wife discovered this, she accused Margo of witchcraft and stealing her husband. Philip was too scared of losing his reputation to speak in defence of Margo at her trial; she was found guilty and burned at the stake. Stricken with remorse, Philip committed suicide. The story continued with Philip being reincarnated several times; in between incarnations, his ghost came back once a century to visit Diddington and walk its battlements (Diddington has no battlements). The group decided the year 1972 fell in a gap between reincarnations, so he could be summoned!

It was all unhistorical fiction, but to their amazement when they addressed questions to ‘Philip’ the group received replies in the form of raps (one for Yes, two for No) emerging from out of the woodwork of the table top. When asked to greet a particular sitter, ‘Philip’ usually gave a rap near or underneath the hand of that person. Only four out of eight people were needed for ‘Philip’ to manifest, George Owen noting: “No particular member of the group is essential for the occurrence of the phenomena, each member of the group having been absent at some time from successful sittings. The phenomenon would therefore seem to be collective psychokinesis – PK by Committee.”



After the initial hesitation, the group found no difficulty repeating it by relaxing, singing jolly or sentimental songs, telling jokes, and generally creating the kind of atmosphere in good light. When the group sang particular songs, especially those associated with the period that Philip lived in, the table began to respond by producing raps that became louder and more obvious, along with levitations of the table. No question of a spirit interpretation arose as the character of Philip had been made up. For the next year, until they abandoned the experiment, Philip, the table and the invisible rapper manifested repeatedly, ending up in a film, *Philip: The Imaginary Ghost* and performing on local television. A book was also published: *Conjuring Up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis* (1976) by Iris Owen and Margaret Sparrow

(see also **FT61:41-42, 64:61, 166:37, 212:59, 227:16, 302:69, 305:73, 351:18, 381:19, 351:18, 383:60-61**).

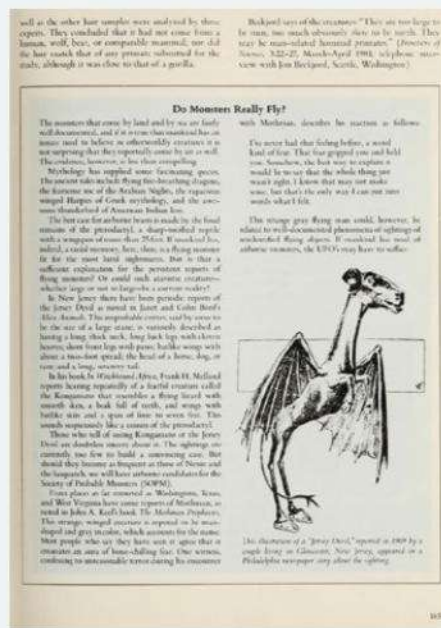
As Robert Charman wrote of it, this was a case which “involved no apparent cheating, no disturbed teenagers, no wilful children, no attention seekers, no hidden magnets, no hidden strings, no dim lights, no smoke and no mirrors.” (*‘Conjuring Up Philip’* (2008) *Paranormal Review*, no.48. Yet in spite of the success of the Philip Experiment in demonstrating the powers of the unconscious mind, many considered by the mid-1970s that physical séances and glorious days of waltzing tables, levitating objects and discarnate voices were all over. Then came the Enfield Poltergeist.

Today, I can’t help thinking that the Steers and other small groups are unconsciously replicating the success of the New Horizons group and earlier generations of Spiritualist circles, evoking powers from their own unconscious minds in tightly bonded group settings, being driven by belief into inadvertently producing imaginary ghosts. This would help explain why with many claimed spirit communications the entities have so little to say for themselves, effectively being limited by the conceptions of those imagining them. Apparently, the Steers are creating a museum full of haunted objects in Rotherham, claiming: “We own the UK’s most haunted doll, Elizabeth. She’s also said to be ‘the fifth most haunted item to ever exist in the world’.” With such beliefs being professed, is it surprising they appear to get responses from what they take to be ghostly children?





## KARL SHUKER examines cryptozoological mysteries that have surfaced on social media



ABOVE LEFT & BELOW CENTRE: Two variants of the legendary 'thunderbird photo', both fakes that have circulated widely online. ABOVE RIGHT & BOTTOM RIGHT: The 1982 Reader's Digest book *Mysteries of the Unexplained* covered all kinds of strange phenomena – including the Jersey Devil – but did it, as some people believe, once contain the 'real' Thunderbird photo?

I've previously highlighted several fascinating cryptozoological reports in Alien Zoo that had publicly appeared on social media, but had never before been documented in mainstream forteen publications. This month's column focuses on another two such reports, both originating as recent public posts on Facebook.

### MANDELA & THE THUNDERBIRD

Cryptozoologists are familiar with the long-running mystery of the missing thunderbird photograph – the alleged picture of a giant killed bird (or pterodactyl, accounts vary) attached to a barn with wings outstretched and some men (often said to be veteran soldiers) standing beside it that numerous people claim to have seen in books and magazines, but remains tenaciously untraceable (see **FT134:21, 137:52, 196:76, 400:24-25**). Sceptics have cited this as an example of the Mandela Effect – the phenomenon of false memories being shared by multiple people, named after the false memory shared by many of having read that Nelson Mandela had died in prison (**FT362:68, 368:53, 394:32-38, 402:55**). Now, here is a hitherto-unpublished two-part report recently posted on my own Facebook page by longstanding American FB friend



*"I still have the book, know what page it was on, and from time to time check it"*

Kimberly Poepppey, which is so detailed and compelling that the Mandela explanation seems decidedly ineffectual in relation to it:

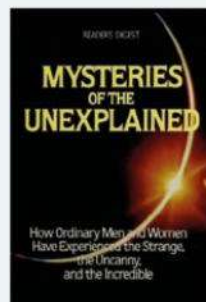
"In 1983 my boyfriend bought me a book about unexplained phenomena. There was a story with a photo about how some men in the early 1900s had shot and killed a pterodactyl.

In the photo a pterodactyl was attached to the side of a medium-sized out building. There were around 4 or 5 men in the pic. They had on regular clothes.

"I went to a Fortfest in the 1990s. The buzz at the con was that the photo had disappeared. It was just gone!! I said I had it in a book! Many other people said they did too but that the pic, article and all evidence that it existed were gone. When I got home I looked in the book. The photo and story were gone, replaced by some other stuff. I was in shock. I spent the next year or so going through all my books and mags, looking for the photo. Gone.

"After all these years I've contemplated how that could be possible. Perhaps something happened that stopped the photo from being taken?

Time was altered. The reason my boyfriend bought me that book was because whenever we went to the book store I always picked up that book and went to that article. I wish I could just say "yes, Mandela effect" and it would be over. But I still have the book, know what page it was on, and from time to time pick up the book and check it... Just in case.





"There were like 20 people at Fortfest that year all in shock that their books or periodicals had been altered. All these people were my age or older. In other words old enough to have seen the photo, read the story. That was in the mid 1990s. Many of these folks are gone now, and fewer and fewer of us are still alive to attest to the fact that we indeed did see if not own a copy of the now infamous Pterodactyl photo.

"I read an article about scientists experimenting with the Hadron Collider. May have caused some kind of dimension replacement? Perhaps something like that changed time as we know it. If so, too bad it didn't take out something more important than a photo."

I've read this detailed report several times and find it absolutely fascinating, especially the extent of personal recall in it. But what was the book in which Kimberly saw the now-vanished photo and accompanying article? As she didn't identify it in her account but still owns it, I contacted her for details. It turned out to be *Mysteries of the Unexplained*, a big hardback Reader's Digest compendium volume published in 1982, and which I own. She also stated that the photo and article used to be somewhere around p.165, but that the layout changed when they vanished, making an exact identification of the page in question difficult. On p.165 of my copy is an article on flying monsters and the famous Jersey Devil sketch, but no photo or even a mention of the thunderbird photo (nor anywhere else in the book). Nevertheless, this is the very first time that I've tracked down a specific book in which the thunderbird photo was said to have appeared at one time or another, so now I'd be very interested to learn if any *FT* readers can recall seeing it in there, or in any other named book. My sincere thanks to Kimberly for her information.

Kimberly Poeppey, public posts on my Facebook page, 12 & 13 Oct 2022, and subsequent pers. comms.

## AN 'ELL OF AN EEL

Extra-large, even giant-sized, eels are frequently cited as potential identities for all manner of freshwater monsters around the world, including Britain's Nessie. Down through the years, I've documented a fair few of these reports, from such disparate, far-flung locations as North America, New Zealand, and the Mascarene Islands. Now, another location, Vietnam, can apparently be added to that list. Longstanding Nessie researcher Steve Feltham hosts a very



NICK HOBGOOD

ABOVE: The slender giant moray eel (*Strophidon sathete*) – could an exceptionally large specimen have been the terrifying creature deep-sea diver Tim encountered while working off Vietnam in the 1970s?

interesting and informative public FB group entitled 'Steve Feltham, Nessie Hunter, Interactive Collective', which acts as a forum for sharing information relevant to this pre-eminent cryptid. On 13 October 2022, group member Mike Gavan from New Zealand posted the following fascinating account of what may have been a truly gigantic eel encountered underwater off Vietnam by one of his friends:

"I've just had a visit from an older friend of mine, Tim. Tim was a deep-sea diver in the 1970s, working from a bell at an average depth of 200m [656ft]. His work was in the area of undersea recovery, maintenance for the oil industry worldwide. Around 1974, Tim was diving on a recovery job at 220m [722ft] off the coast of Nha Trang, Vietnam. His job was to recover a length of special purpose ducting that had been lost overboard. He was to locate it, tie it and await a winch. About 10 minutes into his dive from the bell Tim saw what he believed was part of the ducting and proceeded towards it, [but] as he got close enough to touch it he realised that it was not ducting!

"Tim said: 'It was soft and felt like an eel or fish, the girth was around 6ft [1.8m]. When I did actually touch it a large head looking like a snake or reptile appeared in my lamps. I contacted the top and asked if they were seeing what I was seeing as I had a camera attached to my dive suit. 'Yes', was the reply. 'Go to the bell now Tim, repeat, go to the bell now!' I estimated the creature to be

over 100ft [30m], possibly 120-130ft [42-45m] in length. I turned and headed for the bell asap, which wasn't quickly due to my dive suit and gear. It was terrifying and I never looked back. I've seen giant sharks, strange lights etc but that snake thing was the weirdest thing I ever saw in my tenure as a deep-sea diver!

"Tim is now 78 years old, honest, trustworthy and sound of mind. He now lives alone on a back-country farm of 4,000 acres."

The creature that immediately came to mind was a moray eel, of which there are over 200 species found in tropical and temperate waters worldwide, often in coastal regions, and are famously serpentine in appearance. However, the longest known species, the slender giant moray *Strophidon sathete* (pictured below), is 'only' up to 13ft (4m) long, a far cry indeed from the immense length Tim cites for the entity he allegedly encountered at very close range. But could there be exceptional individuals far greater in size than any recorded by science existing incognito in our oceans, their huge dimensions buoyed by their liquid environment? If so, they would indeed be veritable monsters. I wonder what happened to the film that Tim's camera recorded of this creature, as viewed by his above-surface team? That would certainly be well worth a watch!

Mike Gavan, public post [https://www.facebook.com/groups/141086595460/posts/10166704762340461/13 Oct 2022](https://www.facebook.com/groups/141086595460/posts/10166704762340461/13%20Oct%2022).



# CRAP CRIMINALS

FT's dragnet brings in another haul of hopeless hold-up artists, bungling burglars and literal-minded money launderers



BIRSTATE JAIL



SPRINGFIELD POLICE

**ABOVE LEFT:** Scratch card stealer Henderson Domingo. **ABOVE CENTRE:** Christopher Morrey, the money launderer who kept his ill-gotten gains in his washing machine. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Michael Conley Lloyd: not a criminal mastermind. **BELOW:** Arizona police officers found this screech owl in the car of meth-addled driver Mason Stapely.

## NOT UP TO SCRATCH

Armed robber Henderson Domingo was jailed for 14 years for a series of crimes after police apprehended him when he attempted to claim his winnings on several scratch cards he had stolen at knifepoint during one of his robberies in Putney, south London. Police connected the cards to the crime and used CCTV to identify him. *S. Express*, 10 Jul 2022.

## METH OWL

After seeing Mason Stapely driving erratically near Payson, Arizona, police pulled him over for suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI). They found that he was not only drunk, but high on methamphetamine as well. He also had a screech owl with him in the car. He was arrested for aggravated DUI and possession of meth and questioned about the owl. He told officers that it had been found by another driver along the road, who had then sold it to him for \$100 at a gas station, so they added illegal possession of wildlife to the charge sheet. The police department used the case to highlight the dangers of meth abuse on Facebook, saying: "The Payson Police Department would also like to take this opportunity to encourage the public not to

use methamphetamine or you too may find yourself illegally purchasing a wild owl, for \$100, in the middle of the night, from strangers, at a local gas station". *azfamily.com*, 11 Nov 2022.

## DOPEY DEALER

While being questioned by police on suspicion of drug dealing, David Owens's denials were undermined by his own phone: it went off during the interrogation with a ring tone saying, "It's your drug dealer". This prompted a search of his house that revealed £900 worth of heroin, drug paraphernalia and a substantial amount of cash, earning him a prison sentence of four years and three months. *Sun*, 25 Jun 2022.

## POINTLESS

Following an argument with his girlfriend, Michael Conley Loyd stormed into a branch of the Bank of America in Springfield, Missouri, and thrust a note over the counter saying, "Give Your Money Now. Don't Say Anything. I Have A Partner Outside." The bank worker complied and gave Loyd \$754, after which he fled in a black pickup truck that he had stolen from his housemate. Police swiftly gave chase, and, in a panic, Loyd threw the money out of the truck, along with his ID and the note, which was written on the back of his



birth certificate. This enabled police to easily trace him to the Lazy Acres Mobile Home Park where he lived and arrest him, assisted by the ankle tag he was still wearing as part of his bail conditions for a previous offence. Loyd told police that he had robbed the bank to "prove a point" to his girlfriend, although it is unclear what point he was trying to make. *mirror.co.uk*, 21 Nov 2022.

## ACTUAL MONEY LAUNDERING

When police in Stoke on Trent raided the home of suspected drug dealer and money launderer Christopher Morrey, they discovered that he seemed to take money laundering more literally than most; much of the £322,000 recovered was found hidden in his washing machine. *BBC News*, 23 June 2022.



PAYSON POLICE DEPARTMENT

## OVERDOING IT

Clint Bonney, 34, attracted police attention by driving off without paying for fuel in Erskineville, Sydney, Australia. Before they could catch up with him, he raided an ice cream delivery truck and stole several tubs from a pallet, then crashed into a power pole and a taxi, causing a multiple pile-up. When police did finally arrive, Bonney drove his car at them, but missed, felling another power pole. Searching his car they found a knife, meth and two tubs of ice cream, and arrested him on multiple charges. *S. Telegraph (Sydney)*, 14 Aug 2022.

## EXIT WOUND

Bellevue in Washington State has been plagued by gangs of shoplifters targeting luxury goods stores, but an attempted



heist at the city's Louis Vuitton shop did not go well for one gang member. After grabbing \$18,000 (£15,000) worth of goods from the displays, the 17-year-old sprinted for the door but misjudged his exit and hit a plate glass window at full tilt, knocking himself unconscious and enabling the police to make an easy arrest. *news.com.au*, 8 Nov 2022.

### SHOT IN THE DARK

Two burglars, armed and dressed in police riot gear, attempted to raid a house in Katy, near Houston, Texas, by kicking in the front door. The noise roused the owner and his two sons and they confronted the crooks, who opened fire on entering the dark house. In the ensuing confusion, one of the burglars mistook his accomplice for a real police officer and shot him, resulting in the man dropping his weapon and fleeing the building, wounded, apparently also believing that his attacker was a real policeman. He jumped into a getaway car driven by a third man and escaped, after which one of the sons picked up the dropped gun and shot the remaining raider dead. *mirror.co.uk*, 14 Nov 2022.

### UNINTELLIGIBLE ROBBER

Martin Travers's scheme to hold up a post office involved wearing a mask, hoodie and sunglasses to disguise himself, and carrying a red shoebox. He went into a central Birmingham post office and demanded the cashier put money in the box, but she could not understand what he was saying because of the mask. Travers then put a piece of paper on the counter listing his demands, but she could not read his handwriting either, so he said, "You have 40 seconds, put the money in the box." Still unable to make himself understood, Travers picked up his note and left in frustration. He then tried again at a bookmakers in Broad Street, but his mask still rendered his speech unintelligible, so he thrust his note at a staff

member instead: unfortunately, it was the wrong way up, so all the cashier could see was some phone numbers. Travers then told her that he had something in the box "that could go off". This she understood, so she pressed an alarm that summoned police while Travers fled after grabbing £15 from the till. He threw the box in a bin on the way out, from which police retrieved it and found it contained a crude fake bomb. They easily tracked Travers down using CCTV, resulting in a prosecution for attempted robbery and a prison sentence of four years and 10 months. *express.co.uk*, 25 Oct 2022.

### HIT OR MISS

A business in Westlake, Ohio, contacted police after receiving suspicious voicemails. It seemed that someone attempting to hire a hitman to kill his son for \$5,000 had called their number by mistake. Police traced the messages to a 58-year-old man from Cleveland, who admitted making the calls, saying he had made them after an argument with his son and that they were the result of poor judgement while drunk, but he was still arrested and charged with felony complicity to commit murder. *news4cleveland.com*, 21 Oct 2022.

### FINGERED

Armed with a gun, Vernon Forest Wilson, 67, tried to break into a house in North Carolina by forcing his way through the front door while the owner was returning from his car in the driveway. However, the resident fought back, even after Wilson had fired the gun, grazing the man in the chest. He tried to shut the door, while Wilson struggled to pull it open, but eventually managed to slam it on the intruder's hand. Wilson then fled the scene, leaving behind his glove, containing a severed finger, trapped in the door. It was then a simple matter for police to track down Wilson using his fingerprints and arrest him. *boingboing.net*, 11 Oct 2022.

# MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

## 264: HOTLINE



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

### The myth

During the Cold War a red phone sat on the desk of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It was connected to another red phone, on the desk of the President of the USA. This point-to-point link was known as The Hotline.

### The "truth"

There was a hotline, of sorts, but it didn't allow one premier to speak to the other, it wasn't red, and it wasn't a telephone. After the Cuban Missile Crisis almost caused a nuclear war between the US and the USSR in 1963, it was agreed by both sides that they needed some means of urgent communication to facilitate negotiation and, above all, prevent accidental conflicts. Ideally, one leader would simply pick up a special Batphone and instantly be chatting to his counterpart; but at the time, this was technologically impossible. Instead, they got permanently linked teleprinter terminals, connecting military officials and translators in the Pentagon to ditto in the Kremlin. Over the decades, the tech has kept up with developments: at one point, the hotline involved fax machines, while today the USA and the Russian Federation use a kind of advanced email. Communication has never been verbal, since speech is too vulnerable to misunderstandings.

### Disclaimer

There were plenty of red phones knocking around US military circles at the time, including, according to some accounts, a direct link from the Pentagon hotline operators to the Oval Office. We can't say that neither the President nor the First Secretary ever owned a red phone – only that they never used such an item to talk to each other.

### Sources

[www.smithsonianmag.com/history/there-never-was-such-a-thing-as-a-red-phone-in-the-white-house-1129598/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/there-never-was-such-a-thing-as-a-red-phone-in-the-white-house-1129598/); [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/truth-behind-red-phone-how-u-s-russia-really-connect-n698406](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/truth-behind-red-phone-how-u-s-russia-really-connect-n698406)

### Mythchaser

Is the truth drug, or truth serum, a total myth, asks a reader, or do such things really exist, however much exaggerated in popular culture? And please remember: we will know if you are lying.





## NECROLOG

This month, we say a sad goodbye to the photographer and writer who was one half of the Fortean Picture Library, and bid farewell to an artist of the outer limits

### COLIN BORD

Colinson Barry Bord, a keen photographer and half of forteana's prolific writing partnership with his wife Janet, was better known as Colin Bord. From 1947 to 1952, he was an engineering apprentice and after completing an Indentured Apprenticeship he successfully qualified as a Centre Lathe Turner. In 1952, he was called up and did his National Service in the Royal Air Force; a period in which he began to study photography. After leaving the RAF, he was self-employed as a photographer, undertaking a wide variety of freelance work including photographing weddings, dinners and presentations. He also worked six nights a week at the Talk of the Town nightclub in London, photographing diners.

In the 1960s, Colin became interested in a broad range of subjects, from Eastern philosophies and UFOs to mysteries of all kinds. He frequently attended meetings of formative groups such as the Theosophical Society, the Aetherius Society, and BUFORA (the British UFO Research Association). This led to his involvement with the Advaita mystic Muz Murray, the founder of Gandalf's Garden, an esoteric community in London. Colin's photography and early writing (including an article on anomalous phenomena) appeared in their eponymous and widely distributed magazine *Gandalf's Garden*.

It was through his membership of BUFORA that he met his wife Janet (then Janet Gregory) in 1969. They married in 1971 and lived in London until 1978, when they moved to Wales. They worked together on several book projects, most notably *Mysterious Britain* (1972), which enjoyed a long adaptation in *Fortean Times*. For their books on prehistoric sites and folklore



ABOVE AND BELOW: Colin and Janet Bord, mapping the Secret Country in 1976.



– including *The Secret Country* (1976), *A Guide to Ancient Sites in Britain* (1978), *Earth Rites* (1982), *Ancient Mysteries of Britain* (1986), *Atlas of Magical Britain* (1990) – the Bords travelled widely throughout Britain, to ensure the accuracy of their descriptions. Because of the rapidity with which these ancient wells and folklore-related antiquities were falling into ruin and vanishing from modern awareness, Colin's photographs now form a unique and valuable record.

Colin developed and printed

his black and white photographs in his own darkroom at home. His technical skill proved invaluable when, in the late 1970s, the Bords created the Fortean Picture Library in collaboration with Bob Rickard, who had just started *Fortean Times*. This involved acquiring and copying photographs and other illustrations

relating to various fortean topics and making them available for publication in books and magazines, TV programmes, etc.

In the days before digital photography – in which he had no interest whatsoever – Colin became very skilled at copying black and white prints and colour transparencies to the highest standards. Janet and Colin ran the Fortean Picture Library from their home in Wales for 25 years before handing it over to the London agency TopFoto. They also produced several heavily

illustrated books on fortean topics, including *Alien Animals* (1980), *Bigfoot Casebook* (1982) and later *Bigfoot Casebook Updated* (2006), *Modern Mysteries of Britain* (1987) and *Modern Mysteries of the World* (1989).

*Colin Bord, photographer and fortean writer, born London 19 Dec 1931; died Denbighshire 21 Oct 2022, aged 90.*

### BRIAN CATLING

Author, filmmaker, painter, performer, poet, sculptor, teacher – Brian Catling channelled his creativity, sometimes chaotically, sometimes with exquisite deliberation, into a broad body of work that routinely expressed a sense of otherness and the sublime.

Adopted by a working-class family in south London, growing up playing in bomb sites, he struggled with conventional schooling, no doubt in part due to his dyslexia and a severe stutter. But there was also something else, an innate sense of alterity, something he said he recognised on first seeing Charles Laughton as Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939).

Eventually finding his feet at the Royal College of Art, where he would later teach, Catling was celebrated for his intense performance pieces, sometimes working with sculptural items of his own creation, at other times engaging spontaneously with a site and its objects: he seemed equally at home, or perhaps *unheimlich*, performing in museums, galleries, churches or ruins. These pieces ranged from the quietly strange – communing with a cyclopean child's skull in the Hunterian Museum, (a figure that would go on to express itself repeatedly through his work) – to the entirely calamitous, for instance setting off several rape alarms attached to his head.



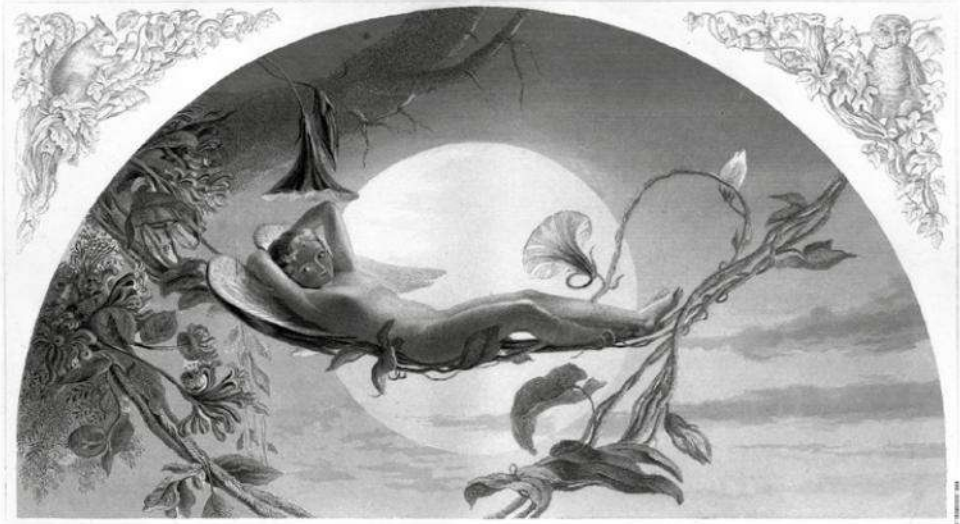


Catling's work often touched on subjects close to our fortean hearts – Spiritualism, teratology, geomancy, alchemy – but none came closer than his 1999 film *Vanished! A Video Séance*; a masterpiece of the uncanny, made with screenwriter Tony Grisoni, it tells the story of Gef the talking mongoose via the summoned spirits of his human hosts, the Irvings. While much of his work as an artist involved physical performance, he also wrote poetry and, in his 60s, surprised many, including, by his own admission, himself, by writing a trilogy of fantasy novels, *The Vorrh*, to great acclaim, drawing comparisons to Mervyn Peake.

For someone who had an almost mediumistic ability to tap into the other side – his *dæmon*, the imaginal, the collective unconscious, however we like to think of it – with often unsettling results, Catling, despite his potentially imposing physical appearance, was an affable, generous and truly inspiring presence. He was lauded as a teacher and tutor, lately at the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, where he formed close bonds with many of his students, several of whom went on to make their mark as artists and writers.

A vivid insight into Catling's mind and work – *B. Catling: Where Does It All Come From?* – made for BBC Arena by Geoff Cox and Andy Starke, aired early in 2022 and is available online

*Brian Catling, artist, writer and teacher, born London 23 Oct 1948; died 26 Sept 2022, aged 74.*  
**Mark Pilkington**



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### KILLER MUSIC

East Anglia used to have one of the poorest reputations for fairy encounters in Great Britain. Francis Young has to some extent corrected this impression with his excellent *Suffolk Fairylure* (2019). It is to be hoped that John Clark will also make us think more about EA fairies with, sooner or later, a volume on the green children of Woolpit. But it remains a joy to run across any hint of fairylure from this relatively fairy-free part of Britain.

I was, then, particularly excited to trip over a 17th-century fairy-sounding reference from Suffolk. The writer in question is the Neo-Platonist Henry More (1614-1687), who believed passionately in the existence of an unseen world. In this passage he discourses on great voices at sea and lights over fairy mounds in Ireland (a valuable early reference). Then, he tells us of the killer music from Suffolk...

More had heard of the music at King's College, Cambridge, from a friend, 'Mr Samson'. I imagine the two dons dipping their heads in private talk while the others around banged on about King and Parliament, Quakers, Anabaptists and other apparently important issues of the day. "I heard credibly reported," writes More, "of a whole Family that died one after another in a little time, and ever some while before any of the House

fell sick, there was Musick heard to go from the House (though nothing seen) playing all along."

Now it is true that music is, in fortean terms, by no means associated with fairies alone. Many ghost accounts include noise and some include music. The Virgin has, it can occasionally seem, her own attendant

orchestra, and I am reliably told that there are cases where alien visitations are associated with melodies. However, the fact that the family in question was knocked off one by one reminds me of the fey taking their revenge on a local landowner who has broken one of their incomprehensible rules. There is a horrid inevitability to it. First, the cattle, then the children start dying off, then finally the fairies turn their sharpened nails on the miscreant himself. I was also intrigued,

thinking of fairies, by the origins of the music, which did not come from the house but from the surrounding countryside. "[S]everal People out of curiosity would follow [the music], who observed it to pass through the Field till it came to a wood, and there they left it or lost it."

It is a great pity that we do not know where in Suffolk this deadly music came from. Perhaps in the west, not that far from Cambridge where Mr Samson reported it?

**Simon** is co-presenter of the *Boggart and Banshee* podcast.

"I HEARD  
CREDIBLY  
REPORTED OF A  
WHOLE FAMILY  
THAT DIED ONE  
AFTER ANOTHER  
IN A LITTLE TIME"



## Blast from the past

**NIGEL WATSON** looks at recent reinvestigations of a classic Canadian close encounter

### GOODBYE, SCIENTIFIC UFOLOGY?

Now that the military, NASA and SETI-types are on the case regarding UAPs, it leaves little room for amateur investigators to make much of an impact. As a consequence, amateurs are likely to place a greater emphasis on the more esoteric aspects of UFO encounters and alien abductions. UFO researcher Kathleen Marden, for instance, has recently stated: "I am no longer a scientific ufologist because I have moved beyond the type of UFO research that I was immersed in for 32 years. My research and investigation continues to grow and flourish but I have stepped onto a different path. My new focus is on assisting Contact Experiencers and humankind in general, to move beyond fear and the chains that bind us, to a deeper understanding of consciousness... I am on a spiritual journey in service to humanity."

### FALCON LAKE FILES RE-OPENED

While prospecting in Whiteshell forest, near Falcon Lake, Canada, on 20 May 1967, Stefan Michalak saw a flying saucer land nearby. The encounter left him feeling disorientated, weak and nauseous. A powerful piece of evidence was that as the craft took off, a beam of light shot from it, producing a grid-like pattern on his abdomen. Not long afterwards a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) constable met Stefan, who seemed to be drunk and had what looked like black wood ashes rubbed on his chest.

The Falcon Lake incident has become a classic case – yet, like most things in ufology, nothing is ever simple or straightforward.

In a recent review of the case the Three-Dollar Kit website notes that there are discrepancies in the description of the burns on Stefan's chest and abdomen.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the incident, two doctors who examined him did not notice anything unusual or grid-like about his burns, and photographs taken a few days later clearly show red blotches on his stomach. It was only after he was readmitted to hospital that a newspaper report in January 1968 showed a grid of red marks on his stomach. These marks are more like the grid pattern burns on his undershirt, but would have aligned more with his chest than his abdomen. There are also discrepancies in the sketches and description of the craft that don't match with his story. All of this makes the Three-Dollar Kit website think he retroactively inserted the checkerboard pattern of 'burns' into his story.

Chris Rutkowski, who wrote *When They Appeared: Falcon Lake 1967: The Inside Story*



of *a Close Encounter* (August Night Books, 2019) with Stan Michalak, Stefan's son, makes a strong case for it not being a hoax:

"If the belief was that the witness faked a UFO landing, burned himself once, then 'improved' the burns on his body because of a desire for more attention, that makes the hoax rather complicated. As for stating that 'nobody saw a checkerboard or dot pattern of burns or welts on Michalak's body after his alleged encounter with a UFO, including himself, and that he fabricated the pattern on his stomach in January. He retroactively inserted it into his story...', that would come as a surprise to the family members, who did see such marks immediately following the encounter in June.

"The possibility of a hoax had been considered by all investigators, including the RCMP, RCAF, and civilian researchers. It's important to note that none considered the witness to have been a hoaxer himself, although there is some evidence that a third party might have deliberately contaminated the case. The witness was physically ill and had physical effects, and although there is no continuous record of the burns and lesions, family members and investigators at the time observed the physical effects throughout his recovery."

As Chris states, besides the hoax explanation, "Other definitive explanations offered over the years include: the witness attempting to manufacture a nuclear device; he had ingested hallucinogenic mushrooms; and that he had indeed seen an American

secret test vehicle."

He also makes the point that Stefan never thought he saw an alien craft; instead he regarded it as an American secret test vehicle. That being the case, Chris wonders why he would hoax "an American military craft? To what end? If so, this is truly unique in the annals of ufology, where the witness didn't hoax a UFO experience."

Nonetheless, the Three-Dollar Kit website concludes: "The other evidence for this case is unconvincing or turned out to be red herrings: no radiation poisoning, no unusual radioactivity at the site, and other features at the site such as silver rods, dead leaves and cleared rock could easily be manmade or planted."

A further new twist to the story is the discovery that Stefan was involved in a reckless driving case in 1964. It was highly probable that he was intoxicated, and he acted in a belligerent manner when arrested; most damning was that he had driven for a considerable distance without headlights. He was sentenced to one year in jail.<sup>2</sup> UFO researcher James Easton thinks this has repercussions for Canada's most famous case, as this information might well have stopped the authorities from taking it seriously. As it was, official investigators found Stefan to be "at times inebriated, confused, and disingenuous; he maintained, however, that he had experienced a traumatic event..."<sup>3</sup>

The UFO Conjectures blog thinks such a debate about an "old UFO report (or hoax), debated ad infinitum, ad perpetuum, ad nauseum gets us nowhere," adding: "We've moved along, since AATIP. UFOs are. Finding just exactly what they are is where we need to continue to go, not backtrack to musty UFO tales that are now fables."<sup>4</sup>

Although, all-in-all, it adds up to a bit of a head-scratcher, 'musty tales' such as this one do highlight the typical twists and turns of a UFO investigation by different agencies and individuals with different agendas. Lessons for future investigations? If only!

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> [threedollarkit.weebly.com/falcon-lake.html](http://threedollarkit.weebly.com/falcon-lake.html)

<sup>2</sup> [jceaston.com/1964\\_05\\_25\\_Leader\\_Post.pdf](http://jceaston.com/1964_05_25_Leader_Post.pdf)  
[dollarkit.weebly.com/falcon-lake.html](http://dollarkit.weebly.com/falcon-lake.html)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Hayes, *Search for the Unknown*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022, p.112.

<sup>4</sup> [ufoconjectures.blogspot.com/2022/11/missing-ufo-forest-for-trees.html](http://ufoconjectures.blogspot.com/2022/11/missing-ufo-forest-for-trees.html)





# Parallels, Part One

JENNY RANGLES wonders if stories of lonely roads and vanished villages might involve time slips

The big question about UFOs is: where do they come from? There have always been several sides to any discussion of where any UFOs and their occupants might originate – with outer space just one option. But there is another. Because there is support for the existence of UFOs as an historical phenomenon, as well as for them suddenly appearing when we took our first interstellar steps after World War Two.

If they have been ever present in history, UFOs could well not be intelligence-driven at all. They might just be unresolved natural phenomena.

However, if we assume that any of the things seen have an intelligence behind them, then the largest factor opposing arrival from another world is the human-like appearance and behaviour of the entities reported. As I noted in a past column, they do not seem alien enough, let alone behave like an exotic species. Acting remarkably like human explorers, they seem more a reflection of our own subconscious. Which I find telling.

There are two possible reasons why that might be so. One is that the perception of a 'thing up in the sky' – the UFO – is a construct built by the consciousness of the witness. This could be done via imagination to sell the weirdness to themselves, based on a trigger such as space junk burning up in the atmosphere – a kind of mental gymnastics to resolve the puzzle on the presumption it *must* be alien.

Or could these visitors *be from Earth* – just not the one we know? Perhaps from the future – an option we considered in a recent article – who possibly would not want that to be revealed, to avoid paradox. Or they might come from an increasingly interesting third possibility – a coincident or parallel dimension of space-time where humanity has developed differently but in other respects is a mirror of our human world. Hence there is both parallel and continuity. These other options are being tentatively explored in science as we probe deeper into the nature of space-time.

Over 40 years ago I was meeting my fiancé's wider family for the first time at an engagement party, and they learned I was writing a book on UFOs. An aunt later cornered me to tell a story she wanted nobody else to hear. I realised quickly why – because she feared nobody would believe it. But – she asked – could I possibly explain this weird event? At the time, I imagined that the copious wine might be the best



explanation, but tactfully said nothing. It was simply a story about how she was on a drive in the Lake District when she took a wrong turn and ended up completely lost, unable to find the main road again. After driving for what seemed like hours and passing through a village, she was suddenly back on that main road. But when she stopped for refreshments and told this story, none of the locals believed her – adding that there *used* to be a road through a village like the one she described, but years before! And it was long since gone.

After some thought I suggested that all roads in those hills can look alike – my fiancé Paul and I had wandered them recently. So maybe his aunt had just got lost. That seemed the sensible thing to say, given I was young and had never heard such a tale – though she was convinced she must have somehow visited the past and returned; which I kept in the back of my mind as an unlikely possibility.

However – over the years – I have heard several very similar stories and after a few more times realised this was actually not that rare. I assumed it was a kind of pre-Twitter meme, spread by repetition rather than literal duplication of experiences. But it was strange to see apparently sincere people swearing these things had happened.

The case that made me wonder came from a man who told me how in October 1967 he was driving through open country in the Scottish borders, not far from Kelso. He got lost on a back road, and had to stop when the road petered out near a village that looked mostly deserted. Here he met an old lady wearing a dated-looking long

LEFT: "I suggested that all roads in those hills can look alike... so maybe Paul's aunt had just got lost."

grey dress and shawl. She pointed him back towards the main road. He turned back exactly as directed and did indeed find the road, but was late reaching his destination.

His explanation as to why he was late was met by laughter and "That's a good one!" He showed the map and explained the village was so small it was not even named there. "It wouldn't be," he was told with a grin.

Next day, going home, he purposefully took the turn off the main road to take pictures of the village. There was only one possible exit – but it led to only a couple of ruined buildings – and no village. When telling his friends on arrival home they said that they had assumed he was joking as such a village *had* existed a couple of decades earlier, but was abandoned when a reservoir was built, and this led to the village being depopulated.

Is this just a meme-like tall tale, or can people accidentally visit a location that might have existed in our reality had not a previous decision changed its future? Usually such an experience suggests a time slip – the modern person visiting the past in a close encounter-like experience. But perhaps the slip was into a version of the location *now*, but in a parallel reality where events took a different path. If we can experience such an alternative past displaced into our present, can the same thing happen with an alternative future?

What if UFOs and aliens are not from other worlds, but future tracks our lives might take interacting with one person's consciousness in the present? If so then it would be hardly surprising if that person assumed the future people were aliens.

So common are these tales of wrong roads to the past that there is now a scary 2022 TV drama built around the concept. *From* is very dark, and played for horror, so as of yet we are unsure how they will resolve the central mystery. But in this story the people who get lost while driving on a normal road end up in a village, unable to escape. And the village they are stuck in has very unpleasant residents who only appear when it is dark.

Next time, I will explore this idea further, adding other cases seemingly unconnected with UFOs, but that just might shed more light on the matter.

# A STORY WITHOUT END

## Fifty Years of *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*

Fifty years ago an unlikely publication from Reader's Digest began to turn up in houses across the country, bringing Britain's folklore to often terrifying life for a wide new readership. **BILLY ROUGH** peeps out from under his candy-stripe flannelette bedsheets to celebrate a key text of the Haunted Generation.

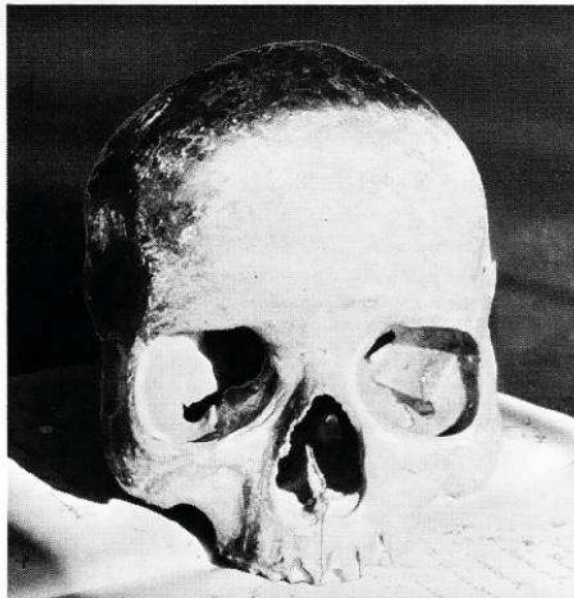
**I**t burst onto bookshelves in the spring of 1973, a black and gold slab of a book: 552 pages bulging with tales of pagan festivals, green magic, historical oddities, local superstitions as well as, to quote, a "regional guide to Britain's folklore".

<sup>1</sup> And 2023 marks a very special year for this much-loved publication, as *The Reader's Digest* doorman, the inimitable *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, celebrates its 50th birthday.<sup>2</sup>

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked peak years in the growing passion for folklore and the supernatural (see Gail Nina Anderson, "The Old Ways", *FT*381:36-43). Robin Hardy's folk horror *The Wicker Man* would arrive in cinemas later that same year as *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, while the silver screen had recently seen Vincent Price as Matthew Hopkins in Michael Reeves's *The Witchfinder General* (1968) and Piers Haggard's *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), each merging the supernatural with 17th and 18th century history, respectively (see *FT*367:32-39).<sup>3</sup>

Television also got in on the trend for all things folkloric and supernatural. Consider the original run of the BBC's *Ghost Story for Christmas* from 1971-1978 (*FT*387:34-39), or Nigel Kneale's still unsettling 1972 *The Stone Tape* (*FT*418:28-35). To this can be added Geoffrey Bayldon's eccentric performance as the 11th century wizard Catweazle (*FT*424:36), transported to modern-day rural England and *Doctor Who*'s flirtation with the occult when Jon Pertwee battled 'The Dæmons' of Devils' End (complete with Morris dancers) in 1971. In music, folk rock with bands such as Fairport Convention, Pentangle and Steeleye Span all carried the stories and tunes of the 17th and 18th centuries into the last few decades of the 20th century.

THE SCREAMING SKULL  
*The Bettiscombe skull must never be removed, otherwise a dreadful fate will fall upon house and occupants*



LEFT: The screaming skull of Bettiscombe Manor fuelled the nightmares of many a child of the 1970s.

folklore and covering the majority of the British Isles (bar Northern Ireland) the book was authoritative and ambitious in its scope. Here was a serious attempt, as contributor Jacqueline Simpson later recalled, to "rouse the curiosity and interest of many who had never before realised that there was such a thing as British folklore..."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, by collating stories from across Britain it was hoped that, as chief editor Russell Ash claimed, the book would "provide a unique insight into the long story of the British people – a memory-bank which reveals the hopes and fears, ideas and experiences of the numberless generations of our ancestors."<sup>5</sup>

### SCREAMING SKULLS AND HEADLESS HOUNDS

I have no idea why my parents had a copy of the book. They had no interest in such subjects, but as a

child growing up in the mid-1970s, in my young hands, this weighty volume seemed irresistibly powerful. Wrapped in serious black with an illustration of a terrifying disembodied horned head emblazoned in gold, it enthralled and scared me simultaneously. The book felt strangely mysterious and darkly inviting, like a sacred tome granting access to the mysteries of the Universe. It thrilled me with tales of Merlin and King Arthur, Robin Hood and Sherlock Holmes (who I was convinced was real, as the book included a photograph of his sitting-room at 221b Baker Street).

There were scares too. If I happened to open the book at the stories featuring Robin

*"The book felt mysterious and darkly inviting, like a sacred tome"*

Cynics could argue that *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* was an attempt to cash in on the folk boom, but this would be unfair. Gathering a number of pre-eminent experts in





FOLKLORE  
MYTHS AND LEGENDS  
OF BRITAIN





ABOVE: One of two surviving photographs of the Dorset Ooser, inspiration for the “terrifying disembodied horned head emblazoned in gold” on the book’s cover. BELOW: Editor Russell Ash.

Jacques’s drawings of headless hounds chasing the tormented soul of Jan Tregeagle or the photograph of the ‘Screaming Skull’ of Bettiscombe Manor – or, most terrifying of all, the ghostly, cowed figures creeping menacingly up the Tulip Staircase of Queen’s House, Greenwich – then I’d flick quickly past hoping the chilling images wouldn’t linger too long in my impressionable mind.

But linger they did, like the book itself, imbuing me with a certainty that the land and seascape of Britain was positively teeming with boggarts and ghosts, witches and demons, giants and sea-monsters. Its impact even eventually led me to *Fortean Times*, but nothing has haunted me in quite the same way as that black book with the golden, grimacing face on its cover.

Often mistakenly thought to depict a grimacing Viking, the ghastly face is actually that of the Dorset Ooser, a horned mask likely worn by a high priest at a pagan fertility ritual – at least according to the book that is.

Peter Reddick’s illustration was based on a 19th century example of the mask, which was originally kept in the malthouse of the Dorset village of Melbury Osmond. Photographed in the 1880s, and the subject of a poem by William Barnes (“a mask with opening folk”),<sup>6</sup> the original mask disappeared under mysterious

circumstances around 1897.<sup>7</sup> Two modern replicas do exist and can be seen on display at the Dorset Museum in Dorchester. John Byfleet’s 1975 wooden replica is perhaps a little more family-friendly than the one illustrated by Reddick, which, with its wild eyes and contorted sneer, has plagued the nightmares of many a child of the 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

### FOLKLORISTS ASSEMBLE!

The book boasted a remarkably wide range of specialist contributors – 46 in total – including many names that will be familiar to *FT* readers. From the then Vice-President of the Folklore Society, Dr Katharine Briggs, to future president Jacqueline Simpson, alongside poet and father of the Scottish folk revival Hamish Henderson and folksong and folklore authority Roy Palmer, as well as American folklore specialist Venetia Newall and Dr Robin Gwyndaf, then Assistant Keeper at the Welsh Folk Museum, editor Russell Ash assembled a team that would put even Marvel Comics to shame.

Now in his early eighties, Robin Gwyndaf – the former Curator of Folklore and Honorary Research Fellow at Sain Ffagan Amgueddfa Werin Cymru

(St Fagan’s National Museum of History) – was an original contributor to the book, researching and writing the section on Wales. It was a responsibility Robin enjoyed immensely – he was invited to contribute directly by the editors due to his early research into his homeland’s history – but it was a challenging commission: how to condense centuries of Welsh folklore and history into 30 pages, without a detailed brief. As Robin recalled: “They didn’t mention how many items they wanted me to write about. They told me to write what I thought would be, to the general reader, a fair and an interesting view of Welsh folklore and the long tradition from the sixth century. So, I gave them 145 items and they published 108, or something like that; so it was very, very fair.”

For Robin the project was not without issues, especially relating to language. “There is a tendency throughout the book to be a little bit too concise,” he notes. “For example, many history books read the history of Wales through the English language. So, the section on our Patron Saint [David] had the reference about what his mother would have called him, which would be Dewi – his mother wouldn’t have called him St David!”

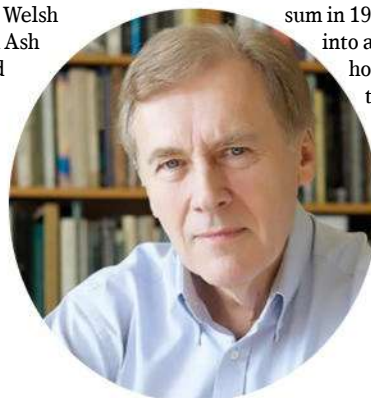
“Or the section on the Mabinogion, the classic collection of 11 mediæval tales. Mabinogion has become the collection’s international name, but the title of the section is ‘A Hero’s Youth’. I would have used Mabinogion because it’s a striking name, but heroes are more romantic! Little things like that throughout the book, but I’m not too harsh about that. I enjoyed working on it; I was so busy at the time, but I enjoyed it.”

### A “NAÏVE, PRO-FOLKLORE BOOK”

Despite readers’ lasting fondness for the book, on publication it was not universally praised. *The Times Literary Supplement* was unimpressed by its “infinitesimal print,” while Tony Foxworthy of *Folk Music Journal* considered the book much anticipated but disappointing, especially with several errors relating to traditional music customs, including Morris dancing and Mumming plays. Indeed, he concluded his review with the damning criticism that “with such an eminent list of contributors, I find it hard to believe that so many of these people would make such mistakes.”<sup>9</sup>

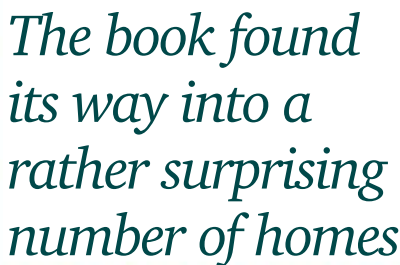
Even contributor and editor Jacqueline Simpson would also later reflect that the book “exasperated folklorists by the brevity and superficiality of its entries,” although she would reluctantly concede that this popular but “maddeningly superficial” text sold well.<sup>10</sup>

And sell well it did. Priced at £6.50, a hefty sum in 1973, the book found its way into a rather surprising number of homes, and certainly opened the door to an audience not typically interested in such subjects as the Wise Men of Gotham, the Ghost Ships of Godwin Sands, Black Shuck the Demon Dog, or the hideous fâchan of Glen Etive. Even the *Daily Mail*,





Unfortunately, its publication came just too soon to allow Bob Rickard's forerunner to *Fortean Times*, *The News* to review it, but it is mentioned in the very first issue of *Fortean Times*, albeit briefly, in a rather critical review of John Wilcox's *A Guide*

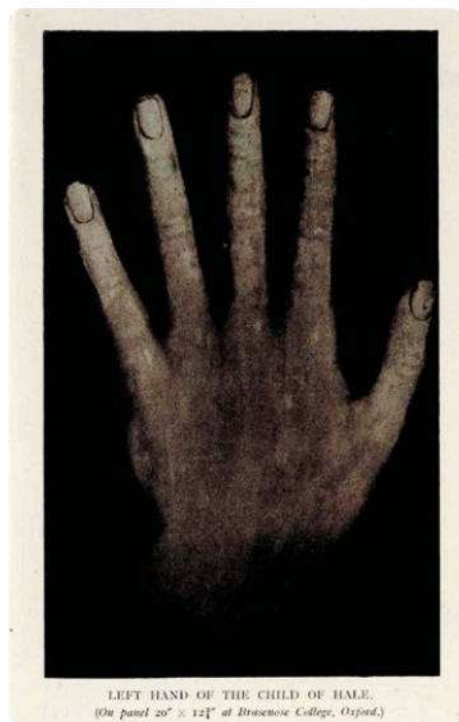


“I love that my local area, ‘The Marcher Lands,’ is featured in the book,” noted Dee Dee Chainey, founder of the ‘Folklore Thursday’ hashtag and co-author of *Treasury of Folklore: Seas & Rivers and Treasury of Folklore: Woodlands & Forests*. “It contains a tale I remember being told as a child, about the Childe of Hale – a 9-ft 3-in [2.82m] giant, John Middleton, born in Cheshire in the 16th century [see **FT187:50-53**]. Legend tells that he was bewitched one night while sleeping on the sands and found he’d ‘burst out of his clothes’ on waking. The stories surrounding

For Bob Fischer, *FT* columnist and creator of The Haunted Generation, the stories focusing on his native Teesside were a natural draw: “We’ve got the Hob at Runswick Bay [see Bob’s “Hobnobbing”, **FT330:58-59**], which is a creature that lives in a cave and cures whooping cough, which feels very 1970s! And the Conyers Falchion, which was the sword which killed the Sockburn Worm, or dragon. The sword is held in the library of Durham Cathedral







LEFT HAND OF THE CHILDE OF HALE.  
(On panel 20" x 12 1/2" at Brasenose College, Oxford.)



RODHULLANDEWU / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: The large left hand of John Middleton, the Childe of Hale, and his outsized grave. BELOW: The Lambton Worm – fact!

and it has a big dent in it where the worm was killed. The Lambton Worm, too, was a story that I was told at school – as fact! And there's no indication that this is folkloric, or fictional, in any way. It's absolutely just presented as fact. Its hellishly potent, and much more likely to lead to sleepless nights!"

As Dee Dee Chainey reflects: "It's a fantastic accompaniment to any journey. I love looking up the folklore of a place in the book before leaving home. It gives such an insight into local folklore, and really conjures the spirit of a place – and its local landscape. You can tell so much about a local area from its ghosts and goblins. The stories that people of the area have chosen to remember and retell over time says a lot about them; who they are and the things that are important to local culture."

In some ways, perhaps, the book has become part of our own personal folklore. Our memories of reading the book, whether curled up in front of the fiery red glow of our grandparents' three-bar electric fire or furtively flicking through the pages under our candy-striped flannelette bedsheets have curiously become part of our own individual, and family, story. "It's like a member of the family," notes Sophia Kingshill. "Like an educated friendly aunt or uncle who takes you by the hand and introduces you to all sorts of new people and subjects."

## SONGS FROM THE WOOD

Despite initial criticism, the book found its audience, and its influence on popular culture was almost immediate. Take, for example, folk rock troubadours Jethro Tull and their 1977 album *Songs from the Wood*. Forty years later, the band's charismatic leader Ian Anderson recalled the impact of the book on the record's subject and themes, including future Tull re-



cordings, admitting that its influence "carried on over to the *Heavy Horses* album, and even beyond that into the *Stormwatch* album." <sup>14</sup>

More recently, the author Kate Mosse noted how the book inspired her too, particularly in her 2013 collection of short stories *The Mistletoe Bride and Other Haunting Tales*. In her author's note, Mosse recalled how the book, which belonged to her parents, "entranced" her. "My parents' book is long gone," she notes. "I managed, some years later, to find an old replacement copy which sits now – the spine missing and in pride of place – in my study where I write. In idle moments, I take it down and let it fall open at a page of its choosing. Lose myself for an hour or two." <sup>15</sup>

Similarly, in 2015, the artist and designer Simon Costin also highlighted that his "interests were first piqued by reading... *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* as a boy in the 1970s... It was fundamental to me." <sup>16</sup>

The writer Mark Hodgkinson too touches on the impact of the book during his early years

in his memoir *No One Round Here Reads Tolstoy* (2022). Growing up in the working-class town of Rochdale in the 1970s, Hodgkinson remembers the book as being the only one his father owned; indeed, it was so prized that it was kept on top of a wardrobe beside other cherished family memorabilia. If Hodgkinson wanted to read it, he was only allowed to do so under strict observation by his father. "By about the age of 10," Hodgkinson recalls, "this book had given me a profound but narrow field of expertise. I knew everything about grisly murders at vicarages; one-eyed giants; the wretched life of the alleged witch Agnes Nutter; and whether it was true that anyone spending a night alone in Madame Tussauds' Chamber of Horrors would emerge as a 'gibbering' idiot. It was. I've seen the drawings." <sup>17</sup>

The recollections of Mosse and Hodgkinson are especially telling. How curious that such a book still resonates so powerfully through our cultural consciousness. Perhaps it's due to the book being first discovered through parents or grandparents; in later years, it provides an evocative link to the reader's childhood; in Kate Mosse's words, a "memory of those long and happy teenage days reading back in the 1970s". <sup>18</sup> "When I see the front cover again," Mark Hodgkinson notes, "I fall through time. I am a child once more and this is the only book in the world, a book as dark, dense and forbidding as a night-time forest." <sup>19</sup>

"It's a brilliant, brilliant book," agrees Bob Fischer. "It's sort of like the gateway for our generation. The 1970s was an era when the slightly uncanny and the idea of other worlds began to bleed into popular culture in a really profound and affecting way [see Bob's "The Haunted Generation", FT354:30-37 for much more]. You see it in lots of different things. Childrens' TV is the obvious example, which is





ABOVE LEFT: Paul Screeton with a pair of Hexham Heads and serious Seventies sideburns. ABOVE RIGHT: Contributor Dr Anne Ross tells her terrifying tale.

riddled with ghosts and stone circles and aliens and possessions – this stuff is everywhere.”<sup>20</sup>

“It’s astonishing,” as Maria J Pérez Cuervo, founder and editor of folk horror magazine *Hellebore*, notes, “at once comprehensive and romantic. It captures the allure of the Old Gods and of this mystical land, its history of magic and the supernatural. Unsurprisingly, everyone I know who grew up with it at home regards the book as foundational.”

For Ian Simmons, *Fortean Times* news editor, the book provides a palpable link to the past: “My father had a subscription to Reader’s Digest and an interest in history, so bought it through the magazine when it came out. I immediately read it from cover to cover and for the first time found myself immersed in the weird, wonderful and miraculous in a landscape I recognised and understood. It achieved the feat of being simultaneously rooted in history and archaeology, while also retaining a sense of wonder and mystery, perfect for an early-teen hungry for knowledge.”

#### FAIRY LADIES AND PHANTOM BEASTS

“One of my favourite narratives, or legends, in the book,” notes Robin Gwyndaf, “is the one on ‘The Fairy Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach’ – the tale of the famous physicians of Myddfai and the mountain lake of Llyn y Fan. The area is still so alive; people still go to the lake today for its peace and beauty, and there is even a belief that some of today’s surgeons and physicians of the area are descendants of the original physicians. There is a society in honour of these physicians, and they still meet today. It is a great example of why certain narratives never die.”

“My favourite section is probably ‘The Summer Land: Devon, Dorset, Somerset,’” offers Maria J Pérez Cuervo, “followed by ‘Land of



*“It captures the allure of the Old Gods and of this mystical land”*

Merlin: Cornwall,’ as I’ve lived in the south west since I moved from Spain. But I found the longer essays enthralling, particularly those in the first section, ‘Lore of Britain’ – they’ve always been a source of fascination.”

The book even presents a few mysteries of its own for both contributors and readers. In one of the most haunting passages, the introduction relates the tale of two carved stone heads found in a garden in the village of Hexham, near Hadrian’s Wall, and passed on to Dr Anne Ross, one of the book’s contributors

(see FT15:4-5, 59:43, 217:74, 220:74, 294:43-47, 295:44-49). One evening, Dr Ross woke up frightened and cold, and witnessed a tall dark shadow slip out of her bedroom. Following it, she saw it move along the corridor to her kitchen. She was too frightened to follow any further, but nothing untoward was found in the house when her husband later searched.

However, this wasn’t the end of the story: a few days later, their daughter had a terrifying encounter with “something huge, dark and inhuman” – a half-man/half-animal phantom that rushed at her in the home. On other occasions, doors would burst open on their own and the family would hear the sound of the soft thud of animal pads near their staircase, the main focus of activity.<sup>21</sup> “This was the first time I came across the Hexham Heads,” recalls Ian Simmons, “which have fascinated me ever since, a genuinely eldritch and strange story. I tried to borrow them from Tyne and Wear Museums for the *Fortean Times* exhibition *Of Monsters and Miracles* in 1995, but sadly found they’d gone missing. They’ve never turned up.”

#### OPENING THE DOOR

Fifty years of witches, from Wookey Hole to Isabel Gowdie; 50 years of Hogboons and Brownies, of Calton Hill and Cottingley fairies and giants (of various types, including rams, dogs and babies) striding from Cornwall to Berkshire. Half a century of devilish appearances (in footprints, on stones, riding carriages and bareback upon horses from Hell). *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* has beguiled readers with tales from the most mysterious and ancient corners of the British isles.

In his introduction, Russell Ash states: “Sometimes the customs and stories altered as populations shifted and social conditions changed, but taken altogether, they amount to



## THE FAIRY LADY OF *Llyn y Fan Fach*

Girls renowned for their beauty, physicians famous for their mastery of herbal medicine, and a legend that traces the physician's ancestry (and sometimes that of the girls, too) back to a fairy who married a local farmer – these are the ingredients which make Myddfa in Carmarthenshire one of the most magical places in Wales. The source of Myddfa's magic is a mountain lake called Llyn y Fan Fach, 5 miles to the south. Fairies are said to haunt its dark and reputedly bottomless waters.

One day some 750 years ago, an only son whose father had been killed in the Norman wars was grazing his cattle on the banks of Llyn y Fan Fach when suddenly he saw a beautiful fairy sitting on the lake combing her hair. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and at once he fell in love with her. He tried to attract her towards him by offering her gifts of bread, which she unobtrusively refused. But her cleverness only made him love her the more.

### The marriage agreement

Eventually his persistence was rewarded, and the fairy agreed to marry him. She warned him, however, that during their life together, he would only be permitted to see her twice. At the third blow she would vanish for ever. For a dowry, her father gave her as many fairy sheep, cattle, goats and horses as he could count of each in a single breath. She counted on fables of five, like the old Welsh shepherds, and each time she called, more animals emerged from the lake.

The young couple were married and lived happily for many years on the farm of Egar Llaethdy just outside Myddfa. The fairy bore three beautiful sons. Then one day, when the family was preparing to go to a christening, the farmer asked in wife to fetch a pony from the field while he went indoors to fetch her gloves. When he returned, she was still standing in the same place, so he tapped her

on the shoulder and said, 'Go! Go!' She paled, for he had struck her for the first time.

At a wedding a few months later, the fairy burst into tears. The farmer patted her on the shoulder and asked her why she was crying. 'I weep,' she replied, 'because the young couple's troubles are just beginning, and so are mine, for you have just struck the second blow.'

The years passed and the farmer took care never to strike his wife again. But one day she began laughing at a funeral and, touching her arm, her husband urged her to be quiet. 'When people die their troubles are over,' she said. 'And so, dear husband, is our marriage. That was the third blow – farewell for ever!'

### Vanished in the lake

The fairy returned to Egar Llaethdy and called all her animals by name. 'Hump-brooded! Rump-brooded! White-freckled! Old White-faced! And Grey Squint-eye, with the white ball from the King's court and the little black calf which is on the hook, do thou also come home quite sound.' She led them to Llyn y Fan Fach and there they disappeared into the water. Four oxen which were plunging she went with her, and the farmer never saw her again.

The farmer never saw his wife again, though on several occasions she appeared to her sons, to instruct them in using herbs and medicine.



THE PHYSICIANS The first of Myddfa's famous physicians was Rhirallion, the lake fairy's eldest son. His mother taught him personally, and the secret skills were handed down from generation to generation until the last descendant died in the 19th century.

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COURTING A FAIRY When the young Myddfa farmer fell in love with a lake fairy, he offered her first some barley bread. 'Hard baked is thy bread!' she called across the water. 'It's not easy to catch me.' On the following day, he returned with some unbaked dough. 'Mistake is thy bread,' came the reply. 'I do not want that.' On the third day, he took some lightly baked bread, which the fairy accepted. She plunged below the surface and reappeared a moment later with her father and identical twin sister. The old man said that he would consent to a marriage between the farmer and his daughter if the farmer could distinguish between the two sisters. At first he was uncertain, but then one of the fairies threw her hair forward, and he recognised that she was the one he loved by the way she had laced up her sandals.

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a vivid picture of ourselves.”<sup>22</sup> It is, perhaps, the book's connected landscape and common history that ensures its longevity; all is included here, providing a potent and evocative folk portrait of our land and the beliefs of our ancestors – in Ash's words, a “story without end”.

For those of us of a certain age, the familiarity of reading the book binds us too – a shared memory of our childhood blended with reading tales of haunted ruins, murderous highwaymen and monstrous dragons; a heady brew, seeping into the deepest recesses of our impressionable young minds.

So, what value does *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* have today? Its resonance is certainly still felt strongly in the offices of *Fortean Times*. “My father passed away almost 20 years ago,” notes Ian, “but his *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* still has an important place on my fortean bookshelves, still with its original, if rather dog-eared dust cover. I consult it regularly, and it set me off on a road that led me through Aubrey Burl's books on stone circles, folklore books by Jacqueline Simpson, Steve Roud and many others. It was a major milestone on my path to becoming a fortean.”

“I'm certain that it introduced several

“Taken together, the stories amount to a vivid picture of ourselves”

generations to the world of folklore,” agrees Sophia Kingshill. “Perhaps some of them have become folklorists. For a lot of people, it was their first introduction to anything folkloric, and I'm sure you can see it in people whose interests are more perhaps in the visual arts or more in literature or more in local history.”

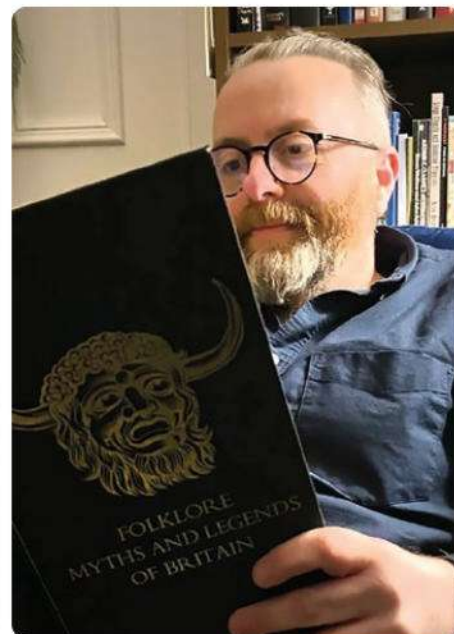
“I think it influenced a generation of 1970s kids,” notes Bob Fischer. “It came into kids' houses unexpectedly, caught them unawares. It's clearly stuck with a generation of kids. If you speak to people from the folk horror revival movement, loads will cite it as a major influence.”

“I think the fact that it's the Reader's Digest adds something as well,” continues Bob. “It's a very unlikely source of weirdness! The Read-

er's Digest had this reputation as a slightly frosty, definitely very adult, publisher, so I love that incongruence – it wasn't some esoteric publisher that put this out. It was published as a piece of factual research, very much in keeping with what Reader's Digest did, but the fact that it had a terrifying effect on a generation of six-year-olds! There is something absolutely delicious about that!”

Its presence evens pops up on that most modern tool of communication: social media. A quick search on Twitter reveals frequent posts when, after searching for so long, someone finds a cherished copy in a second-hand book shop. Indeed, the search for the book has become something of a treasure hunt: you can still pick it up online for the average price of £30 upwards, but the fun is in finding that forlorn copy sitting a dusty bookshelf just waiting for its new owner. Tweets from excited purchasers are enthusiastically liked, shared and commented upon, especially so if the book comes with its original loose-leaf cover. A particularly





ABOVE: Happy FMLB readers of 2023 (l-r): Maria J Pérez Cuervo, Bob Fischer (complete with both original dust jacket and original corduroy jacket) and Billy Rough.

prized find is that rare example complete with the fabled accompanying quiz sheet.<sup>23</sup>

Laments for lost copies are frequent, and regrets expressed when one has lent the book never to have it returned or lost it in the moving of homes or break-ups of relationships. The book's spirit lingers though, in the deep recesses of our memory, calling us down through the ages, reminding us of our childhood, but also the history and culture of our landscape.

"It's got a weirdness about it itself as an object, it's very alluring," adds Bob Fischer. "It's like a Holy Grail, taking on an almost folkloric status in its own right."

"I'm a great believer that folklore is a living thing," states Robin Gwyndaf. "Folklore is like a babbling brook – it's not like a wide river, moving slowly on the lowland – it runs fast down the hill, and it changes its course all the time. Folklore in action and history in action is so important."

For Dee Dee Chainey, the book's legacy is clear: "I do think the book will continue to hold a place in many people's hearts for a long time yet. So many have told us how important it was to them on the #FolkloreThursday hashtag. Now, many of these have their own families, and are passing their copies down to their own children. I like to imagine them gathering round their own fires, reading from the book and sharing the tales contained within, passing them on to a new generation of future folklorists. Long may the tradition continue!"

"In Welsh," notes Robin, "we have a kind of poetic saying – 'Agor cil y drws' – meaning to open the door just a little; just for the sun to come in, and that's very important." For many

of us, *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain* didn't just open the door a little to a world of local traditions, strange customs and curious histories – it positively, cunningly, shepherded us in. And, like the young Orkney men lured to Finfolkaheem by the mermaids who seduced them (p.471), or the mesmerised travellers hypnotised by the Jack o' Lanterns of the Cambridgeshire Fens (p.238), we welcomed our fate unreservedly.

## NOTES

**1** Russell Ash, et al, *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, Reader's Digest Association, London, 1973, p.129.

**2** Many thanks to Dr Robin Gwyndaf, Dee Dee Chainey, Bob Fischer, Sophia Kingshill, Maria J Pérez Cuervo, Ian Simmons, and Dr Francis Young as well as Jeremy Harte and Dr Caroline Oates of The Folklore Society.

**3** Jacqueline Simpson, "The Most Amazing Places of Folklore and Legend in Britain", Book Review, *Folklore*, Vol. 123, No. 2, Aug 2012, p.236..

**4** Ash, pp.12-13.

**5** William Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life, in the Dorset Dialect: with a Dissertation and Glossary*, John Russell Smith, London, 1844, p.332.

**6** Russell Ash, et al, *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, Reader's Digest Association, London, 1973, p.129.

**7** Rumour persists that it was either sold to a wealthy American for reasons unknown, or, more menacingly, stolen by a Dorset witch coven.

**8** 'The Dorset Ooser,' Dorset Museum, [www.dorsetmuseum.org/collection\\_object/the-dorset-ooser/](http://www.dorsetmuseum.org/collection_object/the-dorset-ooser/). The other Ooser in the museum's collection is a 1990 ceramic piece by Guy Sydenham, and much more in keeping with the horrific imagery of the original piece.

**9** Tony Foxworthy, "Folklore, Myths and Legends of

Britain", Book Review, *Folk Music Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 1974, p.415.

**10** Simpson, op. cit, p.236 and Jacqueline Simpson, 'Seeking the Lore of the Land,' *Folklore*, Vol. 119, No. 2, 2008, p.132.

**11** 'What every bride today won't know,' *Daily Mail*, 28 April 1973, p.7.

**12** 'Folk Mythology,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 July 1973, No 3, 724, p.841, and Keith Brace, 'A mysterious Britain,' *Birmingham Post*, No 35, 715, 5 May 1973, p.2.

**13** *Fortean Times* 16, June 1976, p.27. The previous 15 issues were published under the title *The News* from November 1973 to April 1976.

**14** Martin Webb, 'Let Me Bring You...' Sleeve notes, *Songs from the Wood: 40th Anniversary Edition*, Chrysalis Records, 2017.

**15** Kate Mosse, *The Mistletoe Bride and Other Haunting Tales*, Phoenix Books, London, 2021, pp.15-16.

**16** Mark C O'Flaherty, 'Fashion's folk hero,' *Financial Times: Weekend*, 2/3 May 2015, p.4.

**17** Mark Hodgkinson, *No One Round Here Reads Tolstoy*, Canongate Books, Edinburgh, 2022, p.27. Thanks to the artist Simon Brett for this information. [www.simonbrett-woodengraver.co.uk](http://www.simonbrett-woodengraver.co.uk).

**18** Mosse, p.16.

**19** Hodgkinson, p.27.

**20** The book casts a long shadow over Bob's Haunted Generation project. See too David Southwell's delightfully evocative @HooklandGuide on Twitter.

**21** Ash, p.12.

**22** Ash, p.14.

**23** I confess I have something of an addiction. When browsing second hand book shops, but only if the price is right, I often pick up an extra copy of the book. I have no idea why, I certainly don't need more than one, but the lure is too great.

♦ **BILLY ROUGH** is an art historian at the University of St Andrews. His research focuses on the relationship between British painting and the theatre.





# STONED LOVE

*Enys Men* is an unsettling new horror film from acclaimed director Mark Jenkin, and comes steeped in the uncanny folklore of his native Cornwall. **BOB FISCHER** meets him to discuss mobile megaliths, fragmented time and unnerving memories of the Padstow 'Obby 'Oss.



STEVE TANNER

**A**s Mark Jenkins tells me, “the Merry Maidens are a circle of 19 standing stones.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on: “I was told the story as a kid... they were originally a group of girls who were turned to stone for dancing on the Sabbath. This was told to me by my dad, as a myth, but all I heard was ‘This is what actually happened’.

“And the story continues... playing the music for the maidens’ dance were two pipers. And these are two bigger standing stones in different fields. One is in the corner, the other is next to a hedge. And, on the way home from seeing the Merry Maidens, I would always look out for them. And I swear that, as a kid, I would glance through the gateway... and they wouldn’t always be there. They’d moved. So the Pipers were the stones that haunted me. And,

as a kid, that fear kept me awake. Although I was intrigued as well – it was the kind of fear you’d enjoy. Which I suppose is the idea of horror films...”

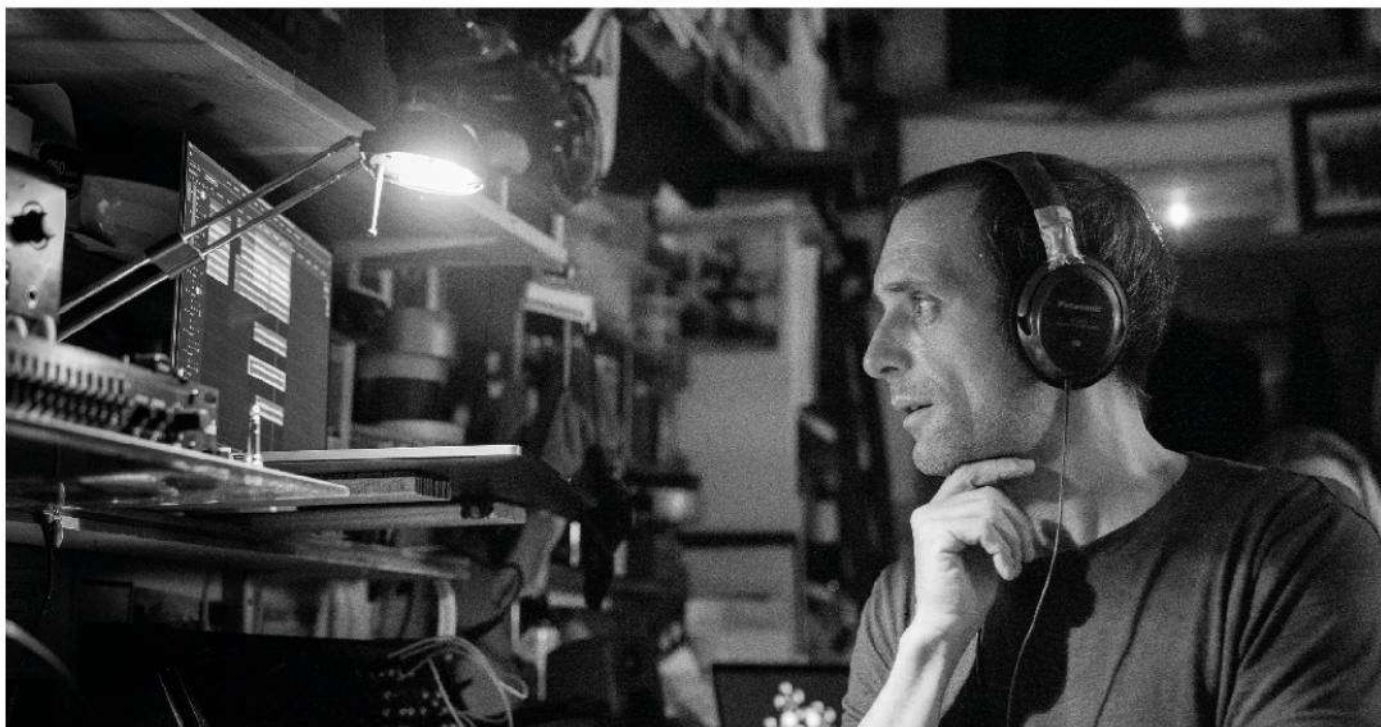
We’re huddled over steaming coffees in a quiet corner of the British Film Institute on London’s Southbank, but the tangled folklore of Mark’s Cornish upbringing never seems far away. His two full-length films to date, the BAFTA-winning *Bait*<sup>2</sup> and new feature *Enys Men*, are both rooted in the landscape, culture and alluring wildness of his native county. In the Cornish language, *Enys Men* translates as “Stone Island”, and a similar sinister megalith is at the heart of the film’s uncompromisingly non-linear plot. So, as a child, did he think the absent Pipers were hunting for him?

“Yeah!” he laughs. “Or they were just hiding. You know... have they gone back to their human form? Are they playing their

music for someone else today? That’s where the idea for the film came from. And, as I learnt more about the history of these stones, I became more interested in them. The myths attached to them are Christian – the Church was assigning meaning to all this ancient stuff to scare people into conformity. And that’s really intriguing. Why were the Methodists so keen to come into Cornwall to control the working classes? What the hell were we up to? That’s what I wanted to reflect. I didn’t want to make a Folk Horror film in the usual tradition, picking away at the surface of Merrie Old England. I wanted that surface to have never existed. In Cornwall, that wild, untamed, disregard for authority is right there.”

The film, written and directed by Mark, ostensibly follows the plight of a woman – identified in the credits only as “The Volunteer” – living alone on a remote





STEVE TANNER

**FACING PAGE:** The Volunteer and the pinafore-wearing 'Bal Maidans' of the island's tragic past. **ABOVE:** *Enys Men* director Mark Jenkin at work.

Cornish island and tasked with recording the growth of a rare flower on a rocky outcrop. Unnerved by the presence of that imposing standing stone, she begins to see visions of the island's tragic past – the dead mariners from a 19th century lifeboat disaster, Victorian mineworkers trapped in a flooded pit, and the pinafore-wearing “Bal Maidens” who wait for them above ground. The island is battered by raging seas and ferocious winds, but the landscape has also been shaped by human disaster. And, although *The Volunteer* records her observations as taking place in April 1973, time itself begins to unravel. Her only regular contact with the mainland, a fuzzy shortwave radio, broadcasts 21st century news reports and – on her endless forays around the coastline – she finds remnants of tragedies that are seemingly yet to happen. Time slows down, speeds up, runs backwards and ultimately folds inwards on itself. Lichen begins to grow on both the flowers and *The Volunteer*'s heavily-scarred midriff. It's a disconcerting and often overwhelming experience.

### STONE TAPE THEORY

And, predictably, audiences at preview screenings are already constructing their own theories as to the film's true meaning. Is this something Mark encourages, I wonder?

“I'm really intrigued by people reading their own meanings into it,” he nods. “Particularly the people who think the film is about grief. And I think it probably is about grief, but sometimes it takes an audience, or a critic, to point that out and tell

## HAVING ABSORBED THE ISLAND'S MACABRE STORIES, IT BEGINS TO PLAY THEM BACK

you. Because I'm trying to make a film that I want to be multi-faceted, I try not to think in specifics.

“And I think people are sensitive to grief now, because we're all grieving. I'm thinking particularly about the pandemic... we might have suffered a very specific personal loss, or we might just be grieving for a way of life. We're very conscious of time now – we talk about pre and post-pandemic. And when we think about time, it's always linked to grief. When you look at a sunset, and it's beautiful, why is there a sadness attached to that? You take it in quietly, then the moment has gone, and you're grieving for it. It's the Japanese theory of *mono no aware*. The gentle sadness at the passing of time.”

So can I bore him with my own theories about the film? He nods, enthusiastically. The standing stone, I suggest, is sentient, and thrives on grief... and possibly even initiates these human tragedies to feed its all-consuming hunger. Having absorbed the island's macabre stories for centuries, it begins to play them back in abstract form – rewinding them, fast-forwarding them, splicing them together. So the film *Enys Men* is actually a filmic collage constructed by the stone itself.

“Proper *Stone Tape* theory, eh?” smiles

Mark. He's giving nothing away. “So what's the relationship between *The Volunteer* and the stone?”

I'm still working on that, I concede. The older version of *The Volunteer* is also haunted – seemingly – by visions of her younger self, living in the same tumbledown cottage. So is it possible the older incarnation is simply a construct of the stone, created as a ready-made audience for its own chilling recordings? Honestly, though... don't treat any of these suggestions as spoilers. I could be miles away from the truth. I've really no idea.

“And I'm keeping a poker face!” laughs Mark. “I don't want to give you any answers. There's a quote from the French film director, Robert Bresson: ‘I'd rather people feel a film before understanding it’. With all my favourite films, I don't know if I even enjoy them, let alone understand them. But they make me feel alive, and that's why I always go back to them. Do you really understand *Penda's Fen*? Alan Clarke said he didn't...”

Ah yes, *Penda's Fen*. If there's a single piece of film-making that feels like a direct antecedent of *Enys Men*, it's this totemic 1974 BBC Play For Today. Even the titles feel like nodding acquaintances. Directed by Alan Clarke from a script by David Rudkin, *Penda's Fen* depicts the inner turmoil of troubled teenager Stephen, tormented by his own sexuality and a perceived decline in 1970s moral standards. His anguish is played out through visions of angels, demons and – in one memorable scene – the ghost of Edward Elgar. And his torment is ultimately resolved by the landscape of his own surroundings. The rolling hills of





**LEFT:** The cinematic DNA of *Enys Men* – Alan Lomax’s documenting of the 1953 Padstow May Day celebrations in *Oss Oss Wee Oss* (top) and Alan Clarke’s *Penda’s Fen* from 1974.



IMAGES COURTESY BFI

Worcestershire are infused with a spirit of Pagan wildness that explosively delivers Stephen from his own, self-imposed constraints of Christian discipline.

“As a film-maker, I’m really interested in Alan Clarke,” says Mark. “But *Penda’s Fen* was the anomaly for me. It was Clarke’s amazing realism that had always interested me... until, at some point, I got interested in the rejection of realism. Then I finally watched *Penda’s Fen* and I thought it was just incredible. There’s not another film like it in his body of work. Or anywhere else that I’ve seen. It’s so distinctive. The images in it...”

Stephen waking to find a demon straddling him in his bed?

“Yeah! And there’s no subtlety – it’s just... bang! The fact that we’re having

## “THAT SENDS A SHIVER DOWN MY SPINE... TIME HAS STOPPED. IT’S THE ULTIMATE HORROR”

this level of conversation about it all these decades later is what keeps *Penda’s Fen* alive.”

### ABOUT TIME

So let’s talk about time – more specifically, about *Enys Men*’s relationship with time. The splintering and fragmentation of

linear time coincides with The Volunteer’s visions and experiences becoming more and more disturbing.

“For me, the scariest thing in horror films is when time stops making sense,” explains Mark. “We impose linear time on ourselves to make sense of the world. We’re born with time, then we choose what to do with it. And, as you grow older, you realise it’s all you have – and it gets shorter and shorter.

“But time is inherently comforting – that routine of time passing. Thinking about the lockdown, I would go to bed and reassure myself that tomorrow was another day and the Sun was going to come up. But what if you went to bed and the next day the Sun didn’t come up? There’s a film I love, and it got absolutely slated – the third *Blair Witch Project* film.<sup>3</sup> The brother of the girl in the original film, with his friends, goes to investigate what happened to her, and they find the witch’s house. And they realise, ‘Shouldn’t it be daylight by now...?’ That really sends shivers down my spine. Oh, God... time has stopped. It’s the ultimate horror.

“People’s fear of losing their minds as they get older is often tied into their perception of time. Thinking that the grandson coming to visit them is actually their brother from when they were a kid. There’s a very human fear of time breaking down, and film is the only art form that can really communicate that breakdown. It can depict a very real version of time... but also the dream-state, where we jump around in time and space in our minds. That’s why film is the greatest thing ever created. All the films I really love are preoccupied by that sense of time.”

Nevertheless, certain events in *Enys Men* are attached to specific dates. A memorial plaque to the victims of the lifeboat disaster pins the tragedy down to 1 May 1897. Were any of the events in the film drawn from real-life Cornish history?

“No, I didn’t want to be too specific,” says Mark. “Every community in Cornwall has a disaster like that. And I wanted to put those people onscreen as humans, not just as a memorial plaque. Same with the miners... the mine where we filmed, West Wheel Owles, had its own disaster.<sup>4</sup> And they say the boys are still down there – they never recovered the bodies. So the actual shaft you see in the film is from somewhere else... we wouldn’t go down that mine. But those who know, know. And the end credits have a dedication in Cornish: ‘For those still out, and for those still below’. So there’s nothing real, but it stands for every disaster at sea or below the ground.”

May Day, of course, has its own signifi-



cance, and is a recurring motif throughout the film. The Volunteer's observations change dramatically on 1 May 1973, and she is also haunted by visions of Victorian children, clearly preparing for some arcane May Day celebration. In defiance – it seems – of a stern-faced local preacher. Is this the spirit of pre-Christian wildness seeping through again? The date associated with the festival of Beltane is, after all, famously marked by one particular Cornish community. The tradition of the Padstow 'Obby 'Oss sees two clanking wooden horses paraded through the town, amid much revelry and merriment.

"I grew up across the water, so when it came to May Day in Padstow I might as well have been born on the other side of the planet," admits Mark. "It's for the people of Padstow, and I'm very respectful of that. But I would wake up on May Day morning, and I could hear the sound of the drum coming across the water. It would scare me and entice me in equal measure. It was almost my introduction to the enjoyment of being unnerved by something. And we'd go to Padstow, and follow the 'Obby 'Oss... you'd hear it for hours before you ever saw it. Then you'd see the crowds go round the corner, and impossibly the drums would suddenly be coming from behind you. It was incredibly exciting.

"Then I moved to London, and on 1 May I'd go on marches. It was Worker's Day. The rejection of authority that still runs through Cornwall means there's never been a great tradition of working class organising, of trade unions, so Worker's Day was something I didn't know about until I left. So yes, 1 May is about rebirth... but it's also about working people standing up and fighting for their rights. Culturally, it's a really important day."

I've just got the pun, I tell him. As one of the boats in *Enys Men* hits trouble off the island's coastline, a message is heard from the radio: "May Day, May Day approaching!"

"I'd never thought of that!" he laughs. "And now I'm going to use it myself..."

## ANALOGUE AESTHETICS

Like *Bait* before it, *Enys Men* belongs firmly to the analogue realm. Filmed entirely on location using 16mm film stock, the feature boasts the grainy aesthetic and oversaturated colour of 1970s horror flicks, combined with the unsettling austerity of the era's most evocative Public Information Films. Mark is celebrating his influences by curating a BFI season of his own favourite films to coincide with *Enys Men*'s release. Titled "The Cinematic DNA of *Enys Men*", the series includes *Penda's Fen* and Nigel Kneale's classic 1972 TV play *The Stone Tape*, together with three of the BBC's Ghost Stories For Christmas: *A Warning to the Curious* (1972), *The Signalman* (1976) and *Stigma* (1977). Also included, tellingly, is *Oss Oss Wee Oss*, Alan Lomax's 1953 film document of those famous Padstow May Day traditions.



ABOVE: The mesmerising Mary Woodvine in *Enys Men*.

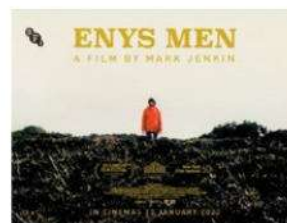
Mark is also keen to celebrate the contribution of *Enys Men*'s leading actor. Given a bare minimum of dialogue, Mary Woodvine – Mark's real-life partner and another long-term Cornish resident – captures perfectly the haunted isolation of The Volunteer.

"It was a massive risk for Mary," he says. "Physically it's exposing, but also... I didn't give her anything to help her. All the normal stuff an actor would lean on, I took away before we started. There's a great quote about the film from Mark Kermode that puts her front and centre... and she absolutely is." <sup>5</sup>

And there's an extra treat for square-eyed TV and film buffs. Playing the aforementioned stern-faced preacher is Mary's father: 93-year-old actor John Woodvine. From *Doctor Who* to *An American Werewolf in London*, from *Coronation Street* to *The Crown*, his commanding presence has graced screens of all sizes in a career spanning over 60 years.

"John said 'I don't work any more, nobody offers me any parts,'" smiles Mark. "So I said he could be in my new film. I even said 'Don't worry, you won't have any dialogue'. But he actually wanted some! So I wrote him a couple of lines, and – in the end – I gave him a song as well. Normally I hate the last day of a shoot, because everyone is messing about. But we scheduled John for the very final day of filming. He'd just had his second Covid jab, he came over to Cornwall, and it was great. And everyone was so well-behaved because John Woodvine was there!"

And with that, our coffees are finished. It's been an hour, but it's felt like five minutes – entirely in keeping with the themes of a film whose mysteries will surely haunt for incalculable non-linear years to come.



*Enys Men* goes on a preview tour from 2 Jan, and on UK-wide release from 13 Jan. 'The Cinematic

DNA of *Enys Men*' runs at BFI Southbank throughout January, with selected films on BFI Player. For further information, visit [bfi.org.uk](https://bfi.org.uk) or [enysmen.co.uk](https://enysmen.co.uk). Huge thanks to Mark Jenkin, and to Jill Reading of the BFI.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Fortean travellers keen to investigate this late Neolithic stone circle should head two miles south of St Buryan, grid reference SW432245 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Merry\\_Maidens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Merry_Maidens))

<sup>2</sup> Released in 2019, *Bait* depicts a traditional Cornish fishing village struggling to adapt to a new reality of tourism and holiday homes. Its star, Edward Rowe, also makes an affecting appearance in *Enys Men*.

<sup>3</sup> Simply titled *Blair Witch*, it was released in 2016.

<sup>4</sup> On 10 January 1893, around 40 miners were trapped by a huge influx of sea water after the detonation of underground charges. Some escaped, but 19 men and one boy were drowned and their bodies were never found. ([www.penwith-localhistorygroup.co.uk/on-this-day/?id=10](http://www.penwith-localhistorygroup.co.uk/on-this-day/?id=10))

<sup>5</sup> "Mary Woodvine mesmerises in Mark Jenkin's superbly haunting Cornish gem" – Mark Kermode, *Kermode and Mayo's Take*.

➡ **BOB FISCHER** is a regular FT contributor and a writer specialising in the more curious corners of 20th century pop culture. Find him on Twitter at [@bob\\_fischer](https://twitter.com/bob_fischer) and at [www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk](http://www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk).



# CANINE CORTEGE

## THE HYDE PARK DOG CEMETERY AND OTHERS

**JAN BONDESON** explores the history of dog cemeteries, from the private graveyards where the European nobility mourned their beloved pets to London's exclusive Hyde Park dog cemetery and the sprawling memorial parks of the contemporary USA.

**T**he ancients sometimes showed praiseworthy zeal to honour their deceased favourite dogs.

With their habitual fondness for preserving the bodies of their dead, the old Egyptians did not restrict this practice to human beings. When his favourite dog died in 2180 BC, the grieving Pharaoh ordered a fine sarcophagus made for it, detailing that much fine cloth, incense and scented oils should be used in the mummification process. Another ancient dog-lover, Alexander the Great, owned a large mastiff-like dog named Peritas. When she died, Alexander led the funeral procession to the grave. He had a fine stone monument erected on the site and ordered the locals to extol the dog's memory in annual ceremonies.

### NOBLE DOGS

Since at least the eighteenth century, royal and noble personages have had cemeteries for their beloved pets. The dog-loving Duchess of York, who kept a large number of pampered dogs at Oatlands Park, founded an elaborate dog cemetery within the grounds. The names of the dogs, and the dates of their deaths, were given on the headstones, which numbered 63 in all. Some of the headstones have verses, like that of Julia, who might have been a Great Dane:

*Here Julia rests, and here each day  
Her mistress strews her grave with flowers,  
Mourning her loss whose frolic play,  
Enlivened oft the lonesome hours.  
From Denmark did her race descend,  
Beauteous her form, and mild her spirit  
Companion gay, and faithful friend,  
May ye who read this have half her merit.*



### QUEEN VICTORIA HAD HER OWN PET CEMETERY AT WINDSOR CASTLE

In 1871, Queen Victoria visited Oatlands and expressed a wish that the dogs' tombstones should be restored, something that was duly carried out. Although Oatlands Park is today a fashionable hotel, the old dog cemetery still exists within its grounds.

Queen Victoria had her own pet cemetery at Windsor Castle. Several horses and many dogs are buried there, some of them

with elaborate tombs and bronze statues. There was also a small dog cemetery at Sandringham for the pets of Edward, Prince of Wales and his family. Among them were Jung, a Tibet dog given to the Prince in Nepal, and the equally exotic Beattie, a Siberian dog, for 10 years the companion of HRH. There was another small dog cemetery at Marlborough House, where Edward VII's dog Cæsar was buried in 1914.

The Earls Spencer had their own dog cemetery on Dog Island at their Althorp estate, although the headstones were later removed to make way for the monument to Diana Princess of Wales, who is also buried there. Lady de Grey's dog cemetery at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, still exists. Lord Ystwyth had a private dog cemetery at Tanybwllch near Aberystwyth, where this Welsh peer put up a headstone for a very elderly dog, with the simple text "Coronet, aged 30". The Earls of Warrington had their dog

cemetery at Dunham Abbey in Cheshire, and society hostess Lady Londonderry buried her dogs at Wynford Park, Co. Durham. Lord Brougham had a dog cemetery at his estate near Penrith in Cumbria, with Latin inscriptions on the headstones extolling the virtues of his dogs.

In Victorian times, ordinary people were just as fond of their dogs as the wealthy princes and nobles. Whereas rural people could bury their dogs where they wanted, the only option open to middle-class urban dwellers was to throw out the remains of their departed canine friend in the rubbish, or depositing the dead dog into some river. In Paris, an average of 3,000 dead dogs were annually retrieved from the Seine; the relevant statistic for the Thames





**FACING PAGE:** Human and canine visitors to the Hyde Park dog cemetery in the 1920s. **ABOVE LEFT:** The Hyde Park dog cemetery and the gate-keeper's lodge, from an old postcard. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Another view of the dog cemetery. **BELOW:** Rows of graves in the dog cemetery as it is today.

has unfortunately not been recorded. Since the dogs were often considered as family members, many people felt that neither of these alternatives was acceptable: the dog should have a proper burial.

## THE HYDE PARK DOG CEMETERY

In 1880, when the Duke of Cambridge was taking a stroll outside Hyde Park, his little dachshund Prince made a sudden dash into Bayswater Road, only to be run over and killed by a heavy vehicle. The grieving Duke carried the tiny corpse to Victoria Lodge nearby, where he asked the lodge-keeper, Mr Winbridge, to bury the dog in his garden, with an appropriate tombstone saying "Poor little Prince". When another of the Duke's dogs died, it was buried in the same place. Since other upper-class people followed suit, the lodge-keeper soon had a profitable extra business as sexton to the dog cemetery. For a fee of £5, he acted as chaplain and provided a headstone.

By 1893, a total of 39 dogs had been buried in the Hyde Park dog cemetery, 32 of them with little tombstones, nicely tiled and with ornamental plants and flowers. Since Prince's tombstone was undated, the seniority belongs to Cheri, a little Maltese terrier buried in April 1881. The stalwart Mr Winbridge still performed the burial ceremony, sometimes with a coffin, but more often with a canvas bag. The Hyde Park dog cemetery was reserved for the dogs of titled and well-to-do people. The inscriptions on the early headstones, like "To my darling Flossie, Maudie's only love", "The most intelligent, faithful, gentle, sweet tempered dog that ever lived: & adored by his devoted and sorrowing friend Sir H Seton Gordon, Bart.", and the

pathetic "Balu, son of Fritz, poisoned by a cruel Swiss" leave no doubt as to the affection and sense of loss experienced by the dog owners. Some inscriptions, like

*Shall he whose name is love  
Deny our loving friends a home above?  
Nay, he who orders all things for the best  
In Paradise will surely give them rest,*

clearly express a hope of future reunion in a Better Place. Reviving the old question of whether animals have souls, these smug Victorian dog owners seem to have reasoned that although pests like cockroaches and houseflies lacked souls, a faithful dog might acquire one, ennobled by its close relationship with its human companions.

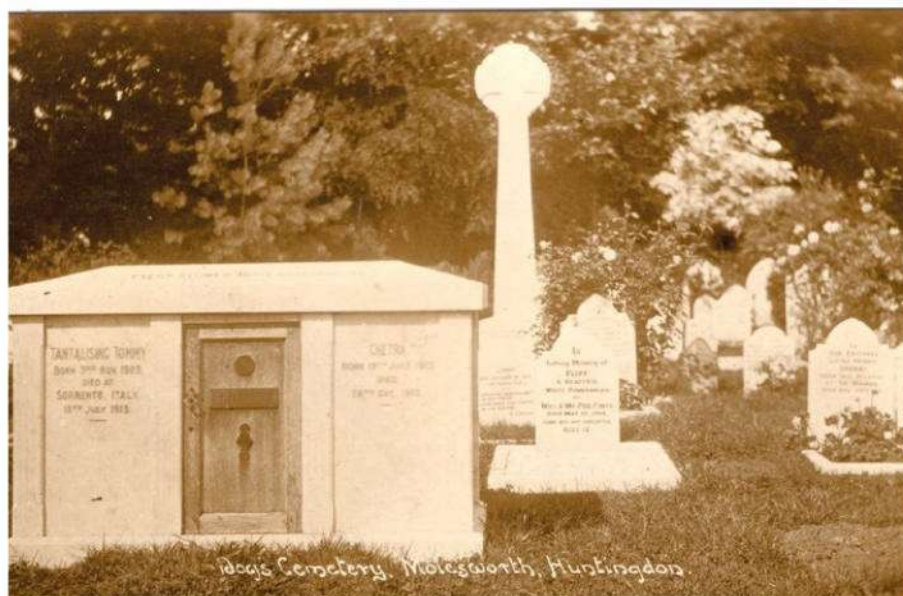
In 1896, when the Hyde Park dog cemetery was visited by a journalist from *Outlook* magazine, there were not less than

60 little headstones. When interviewed, Mr Winbridge told the journalist that he had been gate-keeper for 37 years, that he was very fond of dogs, and that his own much-loved dog was buried in the cemetery. A marble headstone cost 15 shillings, with each letter cut into the marble costing an additional sixpence.

In 1906, the Hyde Park dog cemetery was visited by Dr F Grenfell Baker, a correspondent to the RSPCA's magazine *Animal World*. By this time, the trees and shrubs around the cemetery had grown up, so it was almost completely shut off from the tumult of London traffic. Since 1904, the cemetery had been closed to further interments, because of lack of available ground, although owners of existing graves were allowed to open them for additional burials. At this time, the public was al-







lowed to visit the cemetery, without any charge, although it was good manners to tip the lodge-keeper a shilling for acting as guide. Dr Baker was impressed by the touching inscriptions and epitaphs on the small white headstones, like: "We are only sleeping, Master", "What games we have had" and "To the memory of a little dog with a big heart". In the north-west corner of the cemetery was a column marking the grave of Gyp, a dog that had belonged to an officer in the King's Dragoon Guards, who had made sure his canine friend was properly buried, wrapped in the regimental colours. Nearby was the tomb of the bulldog Jack the Dandy, whose funeral had been attended by nine bulldog friends of the deceased.

By 1929, the Hyde Park dog cemetery had 400 headstones: dogs, monkeys, rats and birds were also buried there. Since the cemetery had been full since 1904, the dead animals were diverted to another, larger establishment in Molesworth, Huntingdon. As time went by, the old dog cemetery in Hyde Park has become almost entirely forgotten. It is not open to visitors – apart from occasional guided tours offered by The Royal Parks (<https://www.royalparks.org.uk/>) – although it is still possible to glimpse the old headstones through the railings, just by the lodge at Victoria Gate.

The Molesworth dog cemetery made the news in 1917, when taxicab driver John McCarthy was fined £50 by a Huntingdon magistrate for breaking the Motor Spirit Restriction Order. He had conveyed Sir Maurice and Lady Anderson, and a coffin containing a dead dog, from London to Molesworth. Reprimanding the defendant, the Bench told him that he had connived with Lady Anderson in putting sickly sentiment before patriotism.

The Molesworth dog cemetery remained open through the 1920s and 1930s, catering mainly to the upper classes of society: some of the graves had marble pedestals and fine statuary. One dog was embalmed after unexpectedly expiring during a visit to Italy, and shipped back to Molesworth for interment in a fine mausoleum with stained-glass windows. Today, evil times have overtaken the old cemetery, however, with long-term neglect resulting in theft and vandalism.

## CONTINENTAL DOG CEMETERIES

The main pet cemetery in France is the Cimetière des Chiens, situated in Asnières-sur-Seine, just north of Paris. In 1898, the Paris city government declared that the bodies of dead pet animals should not be taken out with the rubbish, or thrown into the Seine, but buried in hygienic graves at least 100 yards from the nearest house. The attorney Georges Harmois and the journalist Marguerite Durand thought it would be a good idea to found a cemetery for dogs and other domestic animals in



TOP: A view of the Molesworth dog cemetery. ABOVE CENTRE: The small cemetery for run-over dogs and cats at the 'Boiling Kettle' café at Hildenborough, Kent, which was demolished in 1956. ABOVE: The Edinburgh cemetery for regimental dogs, a postcard stamped and posted in 1910; this dog cemetery still exists today.

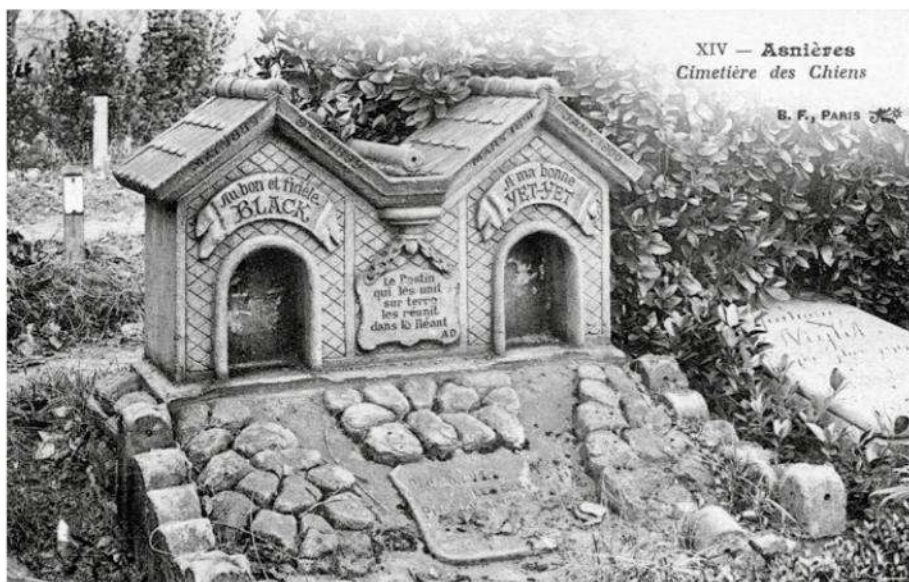
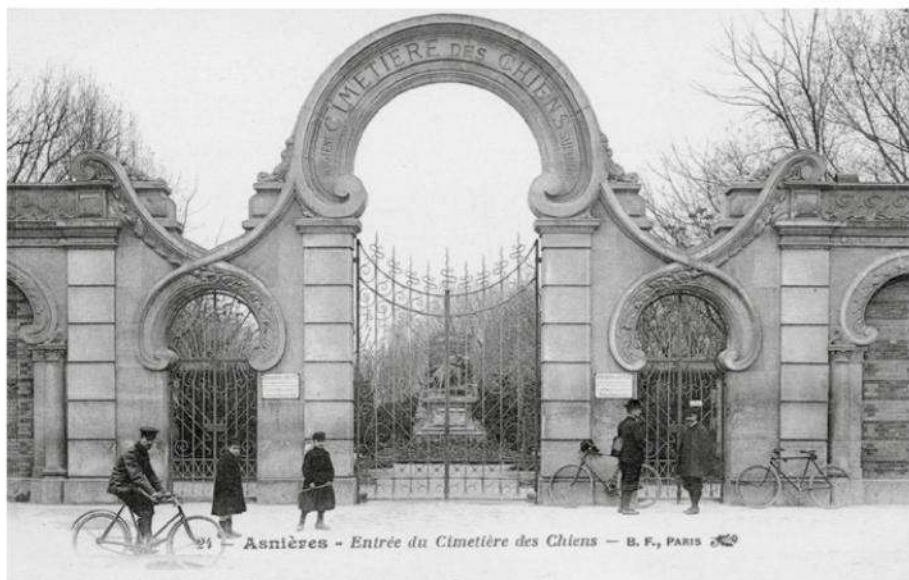


the outskirts of Paris. Some riverfront land in Asnières-sur-Seine was purchased, and the Cimetière des Chiens opened in 1899. Remaining more or less intact today, the cemetery is a most impressive sight, which canophile visitors to Paris should take good care not to miss. Over the years, not less than 40,000 animals have been buried there; not only dogs, but also cats, hamsters, mice and fish, a racehorse, a lion, and a monkey. The handsome Art Nouveau entrance to the Cimetière des Chiens, designed by Paris architect Eugène Petit, dates back to the opening of the cemetery in 1899.

The most prominent monument in the Cimetière des Chiens is that to the famous St Bernard Barry, who is depicted saving a child. The most famous dog interred there must surely be Rin Tin Tin, the celebrated acting dog, whose tomb is regularly visited by American cinema buffs. Some of the other dead dogs are notable only for their famous owners, like Alexandre Dumas, the Princess Lobanof, and Princess Elizabeth of Romania. All dogs that are not dead and buried need to be kept on a short lead within the premises of the Cimetière des Chiens, since there is a plentiful population of cemetery cats, who like to sun themselves on the old tombs.

In 1898, the *Westminster Budget* published a feature on dog cemeteries. It contrasted the well kept Hyde Park dog cemetery, and the quaint cemetery for military dogs at Edinburgh Castle, with a recent example of gross disrespect for deceased canines, emanating from Germany. An eccentric old Berliner named Vogel, known as Dog-Vogel because of his great fondness for dogs, had purchased a plot of land near one of the great graveyards of Berlin and turned it into a dog cemetery. Dogs belonging to Dog-Vogel and his friends were buried here, and also dogs that had saved a human life or performed some other valorous act. Dog-Vogel employed a grave-digger who was also the keeper of the cemetery; he made sure that flowers were planted on the graves, and that tablets were erected to tell the tales of the dogs' heroism. A collie named Victor was credited with saving six adults and nine children from drowning. After Dog-Vogel had died, his friends made sure the dog cemetery was well taken care of; they found it very appropriate that the dogs were buried just outside the great graveyard where their masters' bones would one day be laid to rest. But in 1898, some influential religious bigots found it distasteful to have a dog cemetery just outside one for human beings, and the place was levelled to the ground.

Dog-Vogel's cemetery cannot have been the only one in Germany at the time, but these early German dog cemeteries still await their chronicler. In 1926, another Berlin dog cemetery, containing 700 graves, was destroyed to create a new city market. In 1935, an article in an SS maga-



TOP: The entrance to the Cimetière des Chiens in Paris. ABOVE CENTRE: Graves in the cemetery on a turn of the century postcard. ABOVE: A monument to the heroic St Bernard, Barry, depicted saving a child.





ABOVE: Hartsdale Canine Cemetery, the first of its kind in the USA. BELOW: A peaceful scene in the Kaknäs animal cemetery near Stockholm, Sweden.

zine condemned a private dog cemetery at Stahnsdorf with the words “Enough of this stupidity!” In the new Germany, the child and not the dog was the centre of family life. In 1939, this advice from the *Herrenvolk* was acted upon when a small Budapest dog cemetery situated in the courtyard of an old house, was removed.

Sweden’s first dog cemetery was founded already in the 1870s. August

## MANY DOGS AND CATS ARE BURIED HERE, AS WELL AS RABBITS, PARROTS AND TORTOISES

Blanche, a popular Swedish novelist and playwright, used to be very fond of his large black dog Nero. After Blanche died in late 1868, the dog was adopted by an artillery battery garrisoned at Djurgården, just outside central Stockholm. When Nero himself expired, they buried him in Blanche’s private garden, with a headstone saying “Nero, Blanche’s Dog. Died in 1872”. But due to an urban development scheme in Stockholm, Blanche’s house was pulled down and the garden used for the construction of a major road. The artillerymen moved Nero’s remains and headstone to Kaknäs, several miles outside central Stockholm, where they rightly presumed the dog’s bones would remain undisturbed by urban developers. Since August Blanche had been such a fashionable author, other Swedes began burying their pets nearby.

This was the origin of the well maintained Kaknäs animal cemetery, which is still open today. Many dogs and cats are buried here, as well as some rabbits, parrots and tortoises, and a circus horse named Don Juan. When I visited this animal cemetery in June 2010, many of the graves were decorated with photos of the animals themselves, and also flowers, lighted candles, garden gnomes, plastic toadstools and other ornaments the former owners believed the departed animals would appreciate.







CBK/PHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The Bubbling Well Pet Memorial Park in Napa, California.

## STATESIDE DOG CEMETERIES

Dr Samuel Johnson was a well-known American veterinarian and Professor of Veterinary Surgery at New York University. He was also a pioneer in the field of animal welfare, and a kindly, compassionate man. When, in 1898, a distraught woman came to see him, carrying a dead dog, he did not crack a joke about her consulting him a bit too late, but politely listened to what she had to say. It turned out that she wanted her dog to have a proper funeral, something that could not be accomplished legally in New York City, since it was prohibited to bury dogs in cemeteries intended for human beings. The kind doctor, who owned an estate in Hartsdale, Westchester County, allowed her to bury the dog in his apple orchard there. After the story had been published in a newspaper, many other New Yorkers contacted Dr Johnson asking to have their dead pets interred at Hartsdale.

In 1905, when the Hartsdale animal cemetery was featured in the *New York Times*, hundreds of dogs had been buried there. It stretched out over three acres, and some of the monuments had cost hundreds of dollars. After the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery had been incorporated in 1914, business was booming. Many wealthy and eccentric Americans arranged elaborate funerals for their dogs. The animals were sometimes buried wearing gold or silver collars, in satin-lined caskets with a crystal window in the lid. In stately processions, the coffin, covered with wreaths and

flowers, was carried to the grave, as a choir sang and an organ played mournful tunes. The most expensive monument, an elaborate marble tomb, cost \$25,000. The Hartsdale Pet Cemetery remains the oldest and most famous animal necropolis in the United States. It has expanded from Dr Johnson's humble orchard to cover nine acres of meadowland, planted with specimen trees and with large and elegant flowerbeds; there is a total of 60,000 headstones and monuments. On Memorial Day, it is visited by hundreds of mourners, who decorate the graves with wreaths and flowers.

After the success of the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery had demonstrated that such establishments could be financially profitable, animal cemeteries mushroomed all over the United States. In 1915, the rat terrier Teddy Miller had a particularly grand funeral at a Milwaukee dog cemetery, with a funeral procession of seven carriages, one of them full of floral tributes to the dog. In the 1970s, Hartsdale was challenged by the 50-acre Bubbling Well Pet Memorial Park at Napa Valley. Some of the present-day commercial animal cemeteries are downmarket affairs, with paper or plastic coffins and rudimentary headstones with inscriptions like "Beloved Zsa Zsa, God loaned us you" and "Penny: She never knew she was a rabbit". For an extra fee, a card saying "Your little Woofy is thinking of you in heaven today, and wagging his tail" can be punctiliously delivered on every anniversary. The more

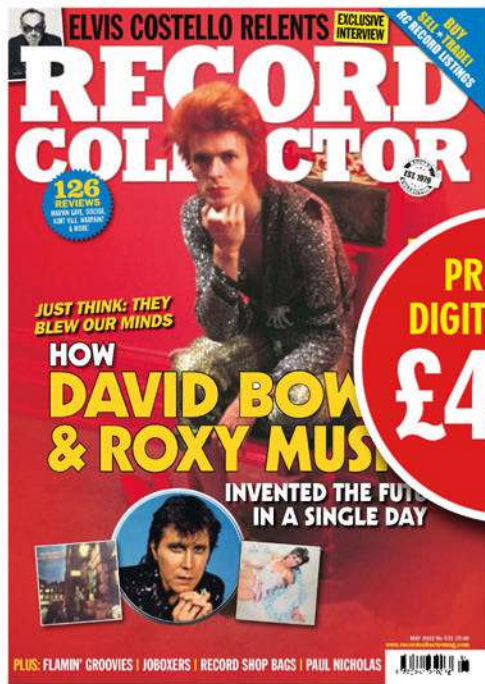
prestigious animal cemeteries offer a variety of religious services, with pastors of different persuasions ready to officiate; not infrequently, a white dove is released at the moment of interment to symbolise the soul of the deceased dog. Funeral technicians are employed to rearrange the stiff limbs of the dead canines, to create an impression of calm repose, and to carefully groom the fur. The options of cremation, embalming, and taxidermy are open. A Utah company used to offer Egyptian-style embalming for both dogs and humans, with the use of fabric strips to create a mummy, and a polished bronze sarcophagus. The Long Island Funeral Home boasted a series of elaborate 'slumber rooms' for dead dogs; the oriental-style 'Ming Room' was considered particularly appropriate for Pekingese.

This is an edited and extended version of the dog cemetery chapter in Jan Bondeson's *Amazing Dogs: A Cabinet of Canine Curiosities* (Amberley Publishing, Stroud 2011).

♦ JAN BONDESON is a retired senior lecturer and consultant physician at Cardiff University. He is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of many books on foran subjects, including *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* (2018), *Strange Victoriana* (2016) and *The Two-Headed Boy* (2000). His latest book is *Doctor Poison: The Extraordinary Career of Dr George Henry Lamson, Victorian Poisoner Par Excellence* (2021).



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## The Curse of Béla Guttmann

**ROB GANDY** gets back on the pitch to tackle another classic football curse and the legendary coach and manager behind it...

I have looked into football curses in the past, including the 'Curse of Aaron Ramsey' (FT325:53-55). It was while undertaking further research on this topic that I came across a particularly intriguing example which involves one of Europe's top clubs and is apparently ongoing. It was recently referenced in a letter by Michael Wyndham (FT425:61) responding to Claire Davy's article on the County Mayo Gaelic Football curse (FT421:51). Michael's letter summarised the key details, but to fully appreciate the curse it is important to know something about the person who made it.

Béla Guttmann (1899-1981) was a Jewish Hungarian footballer and coach. He held a degree in psychology and was also a trained dance instructor. Prior to WWII he played in midfield for MTK Hungária FC, SC Hakoah Wien, and several clubs in the USA. He was a member of the Hungary national football team which played at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. However, he so objected to there being more officials than players in the Hungary squad and their hotel being more suitable for socialising than match preparation, that he demonstrated his disapproval by hanging dead rats on the doors of the travelling officials.

On returning to Europe from the USA in 1932 he managed the all-Jewish SC Hakoah Wien club, before moving on to Dutch side SC Enschede. He won the Hungarian League with Újpest FC in the 1938/39 season, but then lost his job following the introduction of anti-Jewish laws



by the Hungarian government. Following the Nazi occupation of Hungary in March 1944 he found himself in a forced labour camp near Budapest where he was tortured. He managed to escape in December 1944, otherwise he would have been sent to Auschwitz, where his elderly father, older sister and wider family were murdered.

After WWII he returned to coaching in Romania and Hungary, managing Újpest FC again to league-winning success in 1947. In November 1948, at his next Hungarian side, Kispest AC, Guttmann wanted to take off fullback Mihály Patyi because he was furious at his ungentlemanly play, which would have left the team with only 10 players. However, the team captain, Ferenc Puskás (later of Honved and Real Madrid) encouraged Patyi to remain on the pitch. Guttmann accordingly retired to the stands, read a racing paper, and refused to coach the team, quitting on the spot.

He then went through a number of comparatively short-term coaching positions in Italy, Cyprus and South America, before taking Porto to the Portuguese league title in 1959. However, he immediately jumped ship to manage Lisbon rivals Benfica, where he promptly sacked 20 senior players, replacing them with youth players.<sup>1</sup> Given the aforementioned, and the fact that Guttmann never spent even two years at the same club (other than

Benfica), the description of him as "an eternal maverick"<sup>2</sup> seems very fair. The result of the radical overhaul of Benfica's team? The club won the Portuguese league in 1960 and 1961, and the European Cup in 1961 and 1962! Which brings me neatly to his curse....

Now, a manager who has led his club to two domestic league titles and two European Cups, and discovered and mentored the football superstar Eusébio, might expect to be rewarded. Following such phenomenal success, Guttmann gathered his courage and asked the Benfica board for a modest pay rise. The directors said that they did not feel that he deserved it and denied him the raise. Understandably angry, Guttmann stormed out of the club, saying: "Not in a hundred years from now will Benfica ever be European champion." But it is these words that now haunt Benfica fans.<sup>3</sup>

The following year, Benfica were in their third consecutive European Cup final against Italy's AC Milan; despite being pre-match favourites, Benfica lost 1-2. And since then in each of the seven other European Finals that Benfica have reached, they have always lost. In the European Cup they lost: 0-1 to Inter Milan in 1965; 1-4 (after extra time) to Manchester United in 1968; 5-6 on penalties to PSV Eindhoven after the 1988 final ended 0-0; and 0-1 to AC Milan in 1990. In the UEFA Cup/ Europa League they lost: 1-2 on aggregate to Anderlecht in

LEFT: Béla Guttmann blowing a whistle, during a Benfica training session at White City Stadium in 1962

1983; 1-2 to Chelsea in 2013; and, 2-4 on penalties to Sevilla after the 2014 final ended 0-0.

So is the curse real? Well, some people have analysed the data and declared that the curse is *not* statistically significant and it is all down to chance (although they add that if Guttmann had won a third European Cup before walking out then it *would* have been statistically significant!).<sup>4</sup> Needless to say that the curse is believed by many, to the extent that before the 1990 European Cup final against AC Milan in Vienna, where Guttmann is buried, Benfica legend Eusébio went to the grave of his former manager to pray for the curse to be lifted. This clearly didn't work.

There can be no doubt that Guttmann's 'curse' weighs heavily on the psyches of Benfica's players and supporters; but it can become self-fulfilling if every time the club plays in a European final they believe the game will be lost because of the curse. No doubt it was just a throwaway line that Guttmann spat out at the time, but 2062 is still a long way off for those Benfica fans who believe his curse is still in operation...

### NOTES

1 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Béla\\_Guttmann](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Béla_Guttmann)

2 [www.goal.com/en/news/1717/editorial/2014/05/13/4811021/not-in-100-years-will-benfica-win-a-european-cup-the](http://www.goal.com/en/news/1717/editorial/2014/05/13/4811021/not-in-100-years-will-benfica-win-a-european-cup-the)

3 [www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/uefa-league-final-seville-0-benfica-0-what-curse-bela-guttmann-and-where-does-it-rank-among-sports-greatest-superstitions-9373886.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/uefa-league-final-seville-0-benfica-0-what-curse-bela-guttmann-and-where-does-it-rank-among-sports-greatest-superstitions-9373886.html); [www.footballtalk.org/stories/the-curse-of-bela-guttmann/](http://www.footballtalk.org/stories/the-curse-of-bela-guttmann/)

4 <https://medium.com/datacomics/statistical-significance-of-curse-of-bela-guttmann-16aae3c446a5>

♦♦ **ROB GANDY** is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, a lifelong fortan and a regular contributor to FT.



## Musical apparitions

**MELVYN J WILLIN** listens for music heard when there is no 'normal' sound source

**T**he idea of 'musical apparitions' implies the presence of music with or without an apparitional performer in a situation that would suggest that its physical production was implausible. Research in this area has been undertaken in the past by the psychical researcher Ernesto Bozzano, which included examples of deathbed music being heard as well as alleged hauntings involving music; further studies of such phenomena were carried out in the 20th century by the parapsychologist D Scott Rogo in which he investigated people from the UK and USA who claimed to have heard 'transcendental music'.

Possibly the oldest surviving musical treatise is the *Musica Disciplina* written by Aurelian of Réôme. After expounding on theoretical matters derived from Boethius and others, Aurelian mentioned instances of the hearing of 'angelic music'. There are many other sources from antiquity that describe angelic choirs being heard, but a degree of caution is necessary in referring to such ancient manuscripts, since faulty translation may have suggested external origins for music when this was not intended. Further to this, the authors themselves, often of a deeply religious or mystical nature, may have externalised what was part of their deeply held belief system. With the exception of the Electronic Voice Phenomena recordings of Bacci and Capitona, there has been a dearth of accounts of choirs of angels being reported in the last few centuries, which is probably because of a decline in belief concerning visitations by religious figures. That is not to say that accounts of angelic choirs have disappeared altogether.



ABOVE: The Drummer of Tedworth. FACING PAGE: Borley Church in the 1930s.

### *It is possible that some examples defy rational explanations*

The composer Cyril Scott wrote of such an experience, which he believed was heard clairaudiently from "superphysical realms of existence". Modern near death experiences sometimes include heavenly choirs being heard, but sporadic accounts since Antiquity – such as the Angels of Mons apparitions – have tended not to involve auditory manifestations.

It should not be thought that historical references to musical hallucinations have been limited to choral phenomena. The religious reformer John Calvin heard the sound of war drums when no such instruments were nearby, at the same time that the Huguenots were suffering defeat at the Battle of Dreux in 1562. In the following century, drumming and other sounds of battle were reported after the Battle of Edgehill in 1642 in Warwickshire. Possibly the most famous instance of repeated and inexplicable drumming was the case which became known as 'The Drummer

of Tedworth'. A detailed account called *Saducismus Triumphatus: Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (1681), was provided by the Reverend Joseph Glanvill, a chaplain to Charles II and a Fellow of the Royal Society (see FT357:44-50).

There would appear to be prime locations for the manifestation of not only visual apparitions, but also musical examples. These would include old buildings with a known, possibly folkloristic, history of hauntings, such as castles, abbeys and churches, palaces and country houses, and other establishments where, perhaps, commercial gain may be a motive for encouraging such activity; these would also include public houses and hotels. There are also outdoor locations where possibly natural phenomena may have been heard and wrongly interpreted as paranormal – for wailing banshees, replace with whistling wind, and for fairy music, substitute melodious birdsong. However, there is a distinct possibility that some examples defy rational explanations.

Even before the resurgence of interest in 'supernatural' matters in the 19th century, castles have long been associated with hauntings and poltergeist activity – one only has to think of ghostly

activities in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The alleged re-enactments of tragedies enclosed in their walls has lent support to the theory that events might be trapped in time and under unknown circumstances be played back to the present-day observer. This has become known as the 'stone-tape theory' after Nigel Kneale's 1972 BBC television play.

Scottish castles frequently have traditions of bagpipes being heard (Culcreuch, Culzean and Duntrune), and drumming has also been witnessed in Cortachy Castle, with many references to it in the literature. English castles have also been reported to contain ghostly drumming music, with notable stories from Herstmonceaux and Richmond, North Yorkshire, and others. A combination of the often remote location of castles together with the air of mystery they may invoke in people would seem to promote the continuation of legends that present-day owners may maintain for commercial reasons. A less sceptical viewpoint might be that only suitably 'sensitive' people are able to experience genuine paranormal phenomena that lie outside currently understood methods of perception.

There are very few towns or cities in Britain that do not contain an abbey or church, and when not still in use their ruins can often be found. Their mystery has been maintained by rituals such as the Mass; stories of saints and miracles; decorations of angels, often playing musical instruments; the smell of incense; and the feeling, not necessarily just among Christians, that such places are special as settings for weddings and funerals. All add together to encourage what might be described as an altered state of consciousness. Music can frequently be heard in the buildings as part of normal Christian worship and there are many examples to be found where music has been heard when there has been no apparent source of





the manifestation. Occasionally, cases are well documented and corroborated by more than one person, which considerably enhances their authenticity. For example, the ruined Abbey of Jumieges in France was visited by a family on 6 July 1913 and they reported that individually they heard the distinct sound of a large number of men's voices that seemed to come from the open space where the monastic choir had previously been located.

The quality and quantity of the information available varies considerably, ranging from very sparse to detailed and precise, but the closeness of roads and houses to some of the buildings lays open the possibility that external sounds are being misinterpreted from natural recorded sources. One such example of this is Fotheringhay Church, Northamptonshire, which had a tradition of mediæval ceremonial music being heard there on a specific date when no one was present. The author himself was almost deceived when visiting Bolton Abbey when, unbeknown to him, an out-of-sight cleaning lady was playing plainsong to accompany her work there. Mysterious organ music has been heard emanating from locked and seemingly empty churches. Sometimes the origin of the music is not solved, as in the case of St Mary's Church, Hasingham, Norfolk, where muted sounds of organ music were heard by a family. Borley Rectory was the most widely written about and controversially haunted property in recent history. There were no musical manifestations recorded in the rectory, but the church opposite was a focus for musical activity both before and after the rectory's destruction in 1939.

An expansion of the types of property that have been claimed to possess examples of anomalous music would include palaces and country houses. A particularly well-investigated example from these was the controversial event that took place at Versailles, France in 1901 witnessed by the Principal and Vice-Principal of St Hugh's College for Women, Oxford, namely Miss CA Moberly and Miss EF Jourdain (see FT278:30-35).



Alan Gauld (an ex-president of the Society for Psychical Research) and Howard Wilkinson (a scientist who investigated several allegedly haunted places using sensitive electronic equipment), investigated Carnfield Hall in Derbyshire after the owners had reported odd happenings during renovation work in 1988. The investigators left a recording machine in the property overnight (15 July 1988) which recorded "middle register notes in a chordal sequence" on what sounded like a harpsichord. Unfortunately, the music faded from the tape within two to three months and is therefore no longer available.

A degree of caution is especially necessary when investigating public houses and hotels for paranormal phenomena since commercial interests can influence landlords into exaggerating or inventing stories to secure a greater clientele or, with the increase in amateur 'ghostbusting', to attract makers of television programmes and acquire publicity. An exception to the lack of genuine information concerning musical phenomena in public houses can be found in the case of the Prince of Wales, Kenfig, Bridgend, Wales, which was the subject of a documentary television programme in 1966 (*Out of this World*). In 1982, John Marke, an electrical engineer, and Allan Jenkins, an industrial chemist, responded to the landlord's claim that ghostly voices and organ music had been heard in the pub. They connected electrodes to a stone wall hoping to obtain a recording of anomalous music, which was

recorded on tape. They claimed that organ music had indeed been recorded from within the stone wall and the experiment was repeated with the involvement of BBC sound engineers. Alas, the results were poor with the alleged organ music sounding more like electronic feedback than a musical instrument.

Another category of location-based musical phenomena consists of outdoor places, including natural land or seascapes. Sunken bells are very popular in this grouping, with many examples from around the Cornish coast in particular. They have also been reported in pools and meres across the country. Marine life such as seagulls and seals may have been misinterpreted by listeners as having a paranormal origin if their belief system encouraged this; on at least one occasion practical joking was responsible when the Rev Robert Hawker of Morwenstow pretended to be a mermaid and having disguised himself accordingly, swam around singing by the light of a full Moon!

Scott Rogo's studies of 'astral' music provide data about the different types of people involved. He found that percipients who were taking drugs heard more instrumental music than choral and vocal music, which was favoured by non-users. People with a religious disposition more often heard bells and sacred vocal music, and individuals with an interest in psychical research were more prone to such experiences, which they reported in the SPR's monumental *Phantasms of the Living*. Medical conditions do not always seem

to explain people's encounters and sufferers are only too aware of auditory phenomena and the differences between possible musical hallucinations and their medical problems.

A few observations can be made from the data presented. The context of the instruments perceived often conformed to their surroundings. For instance, Scottish castles were haunted by bagpipes and drums and churches were the scenes for chanting monks and organ music. The sound of a piano in 20th century homes and the harpsichord in older properties should not be thought to be particularly out of character. One might expect the electric guitar to appear in future hauntings from the later 20th and 21st century. This is not to say, however, that there were not inconsistencies. When Harry Martindale was working as a plumber beneath the Treasurer's House in York in 1953, it can be reasonably supposed that he was not expecting to hear the sound of what appeared to be a trumpet playing a single note in the cellar or to immediately see a group of Roman soldiers emerging through the wall he was working on (see FT364:18-20, 365:16-18). Yet, under significant scrutiny, his story persisted and remained unexplained, well into the 21st century. The neurologist Oliver Sacks explored the subject of hallucinatory music from both a psychological and medical perspective and he also found contradictions in terms of what music might have been expected and what was actually perceived. In recent times, interest in what is referred to as "musical hallucinations" has increased in the academic field of psychiatry with numerous papers exploring the field.

Specific references to the people, places and cases mentioned above plus many others can be found in *Music and the Paranormal: An Encyclopedic Dictionary* (2022, McFarland).

♦ MELVYN J WILLIN is the Honorary Archive Liaison Officer to the Society for Psychical Research. He holds doctorates in music and paranormal research and is the author of several books on anomalous phenomena.



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## We're naturally supernatural

**Charles Foster** praises a fascinating and profoundly important book which exposes and denounces the reductionism of the humanities

### The Superhumanities

**Historical Precedents, Moral Objections, New Realities**

Jeffrey J Kripal

University of Chicago Press 2022

Hb, 256p, £28, ISBN 9780226820248

As a young Catholic, Jeffrey Kripal visited some Protestant churches in his American Mid-West town. He was baffled by how empty and downright unambitious they were. There were no pictures or statues of levitating saints or nuns in ecstatic union with God. There wasn't anything obviously supernatural at all. The churches seemed to be more concerned with making good citizens than with making gods.

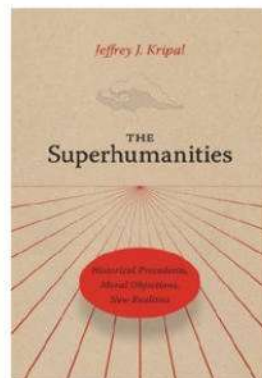
Kripal later became a Professor of Philosophy and Religious Thought, and his bafflement with these anæmic Protestants became outrage at the humanities themselves.

The humanities are supposed to reflect the real nature of humans, and promote human potential. What are humans? And what *might* they be? Jesus, quoting the Psalmist, declared that "You are gods" – a radical reworking of the idea of the *Imago Dei* – and at the heart of Eastern Christianity is the project of *theosis*: the deification of the individual believer. The Egyptian pharaohs were divine. The Hermetic and related traditions taught that everyone, from pharaoh to slave, can really perceive and come to know the Source. Every religion in some way agrees. Sometimes the knowing is articulated in terms of salvation; sometimes in terms of union. The language doesn't matter for these purposes. Every single religious and spiritual tradition insists that whatever we are, we are far more than lumps of meat. From which it follows

that, as potential gods, if not potential Cosmuses, we should take ourselves and one another with divine, cosmic seriousness. Perhaps we don't need revelation to know this: our intuitions about our significance, and the ubiquity of spiritual experiences, make it clear enough. We're all telepathic animals who experience precognition and déjà vu. We're all potentially bilocating, telekinetic animals who could develop stigmata, and we might become universes or, if that's different, rise from the dead. We're naturally supernatural. Humans are superhumans.

If that's what we really are and might be, why are the humanities so embarrassed about admitting it?

It wasn't always so. Kripal points out that the modern humanities were born in the Italian Renaissance, and contends



that central to the Renaissance understanding of humans was Ficino's famous translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, with its exhilarating monism, in which the *nous* (an untranslatable word meaning something like "Divine Mind") "noeticises" itself and becomes God. *Nous* is available to all humans, but few show any interest. It's the job of the humanities to interest us.

### Every religious and spiritual tradition insists that we are far more than lumps of meat

This seems to me to overstate slightly the influence of Hermes Trismegistus. Yes, the *Hermeticum* was significant in the Renaissance, but surely not as important as the disinterred Plato, whose ideas had always been running as a background program – and sometimes as an operating system – in Eastern Christianity. In Plato's cave are secreted the same essential truths about the nature of the cosmos and of humans as we find in the *Hermeticum*. But this doesn't in any way dilute Kripal's thesis. Renaissance humanities were superhumanities. They are superhumanities no longer.

Why not?

Kripal lays the blame squarely and entirely fairly at Kant's door. We don't and *cannot* know or perceive things as they really are, said Kant. We perceive only their appearances. This, of course, is an epistemology very different from that of the Platonic cave. The distinction between things and their appearances has been endlessly used, according to Kripal, "to dismiss any and all forms of ecstatic or extreme human experiences as so many delusional epiphenomena ... that should not be taken seriously. They *cannot* be empirical or objectively true."

This idea has metastasised throughout the academy – in the sciences as well as the humanities – and is, per Kripal, "probably the major historical reason that most intellectuals today do not trust any human experience

and why the hermeneutics of suspicion reigns supreme".

Kripal makes no secret of his exasperation with colleagues who say that it "doesn't really matter if... Teresa of Avila floated off the floor... What matters is how the popular belief in such presumed levitations was disciplined, controlled and maintained by the Church and later constructed as sanctity." If Teresa really floated, it tells us a very great deal about the web and weave of reality, and makes the usual questions posed by the academy of piffling unimportance.

It also makes them boring, unattractive, and depressing. "There is one and only one criterion of truth in the humanities these days," observes Kripal: "the truth must be depressing." Why? Because insofar as (intrinsically glorious) individuals are seen at all, they are seen only as pawns shoved around by some Foucauldian or Derridian current. You never get to look them in the face and see the lines, the laughs, the fears, the animal and the divine. There's never any suggestion that they might be, or become gods. If divination isn't the "true" story, at least it is the story we insistently tell about ourselves, and the fact of the story is far more worthy of study than any synthetic theory about how institutions (far less interesting entities than humans), deal with our storytelling.

It's become (rightly) common to denounce the reductionism of the sciences. Kripal's book exposes and denounces the reductionism of the humanities.

It's relentlessly fascinating, profoundly important and beautifully written. It should be required reading for everyone who reads books other than computer manuals.

★★★★★



# Just a wooden cup?

A fascinating account of how local stories can develop into a full-grown myth

## The Nanteos Grail

The Evolution of a Holy Relic

John Matthews, Ian Pegler & Fred Stedman-Jones

Amerley Books 2022

Pb, 264pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781398106222

The Nanteos Cup, a fragmentary mediæval wood drinking bowl or mazer, is an artefact with a curious history. It was kept and displayed by the owners of Nanteos, a country house near Aberystwyth, until recently. Since at least the 19th century, local stories told of the healing properties of water drunk from the cup; in the 20th century, these tales expanded, claiming that the cup was, or at least may have been, none other than the Holy Grail itself.

In *The Nanteos Grail*, John Matthews and Ian Pegler, working partly from research conducted by the late Fred Stedman-Jones, painstakingly reconstruct the history of the cup and its story, charting the ways in which it has changed over the years. The opening section outlines the basic facts about the cup, although some of the more extreme claims are treated a little uncritically.

The most valuable part of the book is the central section, which focuses on the origin and development of the stories of the cup's healing powers, as well as their subsequent transformation into a legend about the Grail.

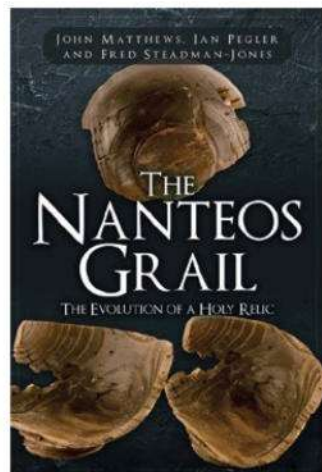
Detailed research into family history and a wide range of textual sources provide a vivid image of an ever-changing Grail discourse. The authors' research paints a convincing picture of a local story growing into something more through tales told and retold by mystical Christians, antiquarians, small-time journalists, travel writers and others.

The whole thing is a fascinating case study of how a belief can change and spread.

*The Nanteos Grail* is a valuable read because of this detailed, thorough presentation of the life cycle of a legend, including its many contributors and the ways in which it has changed over time.

The rest of the book is less satisfying, including discussions of both the cup and its significance that often don't go into needed detail. Extreme claims are accepted without much investigation – when the same is very much not true of the discussions of the cup's history – and alternatives are proposed without being investigated.

Part of the problem seems to be that the consensus view, that the cup is a mediæval mazer that may have come from the nearby monastery of Strata Florida, can't be conclusively proven, but there doesn't appear to be much reason to doubt it. This seems to be a little unsatisfying to the authors, who close with some reflections



on the eternal quest for the Grail inside all of us.

Unwillingness to grasp the nettle of its own research aside, *The Nanteos Grail* is a detailed and fascinating account of the ways in which a story changes over time. For anyone interested in the methods of story transmission and change, this is an invaluable read.

James Holloway

★★★★★

## Duel Without End

Mankind's Battle With Microbes

Stig S Frøland

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 632pp, £25, ISBN 9781789145052

The World Health Organisation estimated in May 2022 that Covid-19 had directly or indirectly killed between 13 million and 17 million people. But, as this superb new book reminds us, mortality could have been much worse. Cocoliztli claimed almost 15 million lives as it swept across Mexico between 1545 and 1548. The Black Death killed almost 50 million Europeans, when, of course, the population was much smaller. About two to three per cent of people who develop Covid-19 die. Marburg virus kills up to 90 per cent of those infected.

Vaccines, drugs, better nutrition and hygiene, and improved medical care saved countless lives. Yet our scientific understanding of infection is surprisingly recent. In 1876, Robert Koch proved for the first time that bacteria caused human diseases. Koch also disproved the then widespread idea that there was only one bacterium, which transformed into various pathogens.

The "germ theory" took a while to catch on. Frøland, a leading Norwegian microbiologist, notes that opponents to the germ theory deliberately exposed themselves to infections, usually without developing disease. But microbiological Russian roulette could misfire. One experimenter survived an attempt to contract plague, but he died when he exposed himself to yellow fever.

Until about 150 years ago, we blamed gods. Many societies had gods to one of the most terrible infections: smallpox. In West Africa, Shapona could punish people with smallpox. Hindus have worshipped their goddess of smallpox, Shitala, for at least 2,000 years. During the Black Death, groups of people travelled around whipping themselves until they bled as penance. Some people, even today, regard infections as divine retribution.

Frøland shows how history sometimes turns on microscopic pivots. Some historians suggest that waterborne infections destroyed the Harappa culture, which thrived in the Indus valley between 3000 and 2000 BC. The

Harappan had well-developed water supply and waste disposal systems. But sewage possibly contaminated well water. During the American Civil War, typhoid fever, dysentery, pneumonia and malaria caused about two-thirds of the estimated 660,000 deaths among the military. Some outbreaks delayed or scuppered military operations. Some estimates suggest that infections lengthened the conflict by two years.

Despite the best efforts of forensic microbiology, the causes of some historical infections, such as the plague that swept through Athens in 430 BC killing about a quarter of the population, remain mysterious. Between AD 249 and 270 another epidemic caused by an unknown pathogen led some patients to bleed from their eyes, and probably killed two Roman



emperors and 5,000 people in one day in Athens. Frøland adds that the cause of the English Sweating Sickness in the

16th century and Cocoliztli still remain enigmatic.

Frøland's copiously illustrated book, while steeped in compelling historical detail, is topical, touching on Covid-19, biological warfare and terrorism. Meanwhile, antibiotic resistance keeps rising and new threats continue to emerge. As Frøland's book (currently my book of the year by some margin) reminds us, it's not a matter of if there will be another pandemic, but when. We'll probably always remain in an arms race with pathogens. And it's not one we'll inevitably win.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

## How To Build Stonehenge

Mike Pitts

Thames & Hudson 2022

Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9780500024195

Mike Pitts is the editor of the magazine *British Archaeology*, and as you would expect is very skilled at communicating complex issues around the past.

In *How To Build Stonehenge* he shifts our attention from why Stonehenge was built (how it sits within the cultural landscape as a completed monument), to the often overlooked aspects of how it was built.





Pitts starts by introducing us to the stones themselves, and it soon becomes clear that while they are often seen as a singular coherent monument, the stones all have very different characters. The next two chapters divide them into two main groups by geology; bluestones and sarsens.

Over the past few years, work looking for the bluestone quarries has garnered most of the press attention, yet the more elusive origins and journeys of the sarsens are just as fascinating and complex. In the chapters on raw materials, Pitts goes into depth about the geology as well as the scientific analysis that has shone a light on the sources, and the choices made in the creation of the stone circles.

The next three chapters form the core of the book, discussing the engineering problems of moving the stones, then constructing both the Bluehenge (the earlier stage of the monument we see today) and Stonehenge. Using anthropological comparisons, Pitts presents possible explanations for how the construction tasks could have been achieved. Whereas this may seem to suggest he only deals with the practicalities of how the monument was built, he never shies away from discussing the social impact, how communities came together through the construction, and why those social aspects are as important as any engineering calculations. Further details about the shaping of the stones, for example to ensure the lintels sat level, are also fascinating.

He finishes by looking at the afterlife of the monument, not shying away from the work carried out since the start of the 20th century to restore Stonehenge (including the stabilisation using concrete that led to news articles claiming it was a modern fake – a very forteen type of conspiracy). Mike Pitts has previously excavated at Stonehenge, and obviously retains a great affection for Britain's best known prehistoric monument. That affection comes through in this well researched and accessible discussion about what might be the most interesting stages in the history of Stonehenge.

Steve Toase

★★★★★

## A Brief History of Timekeeping

**The Science of Marking Time, from Stonehenge to Atomic Clocks**

Chad Orzel

Oneworld Publications 2022

Pb, 336 pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780861542154

If you think of timekeeping in terms of clocks and watches, then this book looks alarmingly thick for a "brief history" of the subject. In fact it's even longer than the page count suggests, because it's printed in an eye-strainingly small font (my only real criticism of it).

But the topics just mentioned only occupy four of the 16 chapters. The others deal with various ways the measurement of time has shaped the development of science and society through the ages, from the celestial alignments of Newgrange and Stonehenge to Einstein's theory of relativity and the practicalities of GPS navigation.

While the latter may not have an obvious connection with time, it's intimately related to the timing of satellite signals, making it probably the greatest triumph of precision timekeeping to date.

Chad Orzel is a professional scientist, and that defines the general approach of the book. Personally, though, I found the historical and social insights just as fascinating. For example, there's a chapter devoted to the complexities of the Mayan calendar – that's the one that (through an egregious misunderstanding) triggered all the nuttiness of the 2012 phenomenon.

Another chapter deals with the switch from the Julian to Gregorian calendar, which happened in most of Europe in 1582, but not until 1752 in Britain. A couple of years after that, in his satirical painting "An Election Entertainment", William Hogarth depicted disgruntled Tory voters protesting against the change. A trampled placard reads "give us our 11 days" – which led to the long-standing myth that the protesters really did believe they'd been robbed of several days of their lives. In fact, their main objection to the change was simply that it had been forced on them by the pro-European Whig government.



This demonstrates how, as Orzel puts it, the calendar is a social rather than scientific construct, as likely to be driven by politics as anything else.

If you're looking for a page-turning popular science book which is full of quirky, unexpected turns, then you could do a lot worse than this one. Where else are you going to find Salisbury Cathedral, Chichen Itza, John Dee, Niels Bohr, black holes, flat-earthers, horoscopes, lasers, railways and the longitude prize all rubbing shoulders with each other?

Andrew May

★★★★★

## The Dragon Daughter

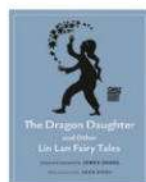
**And Other Lin Lan Fairy Tales**

Juwen Zhang

Princeton University Press 2022

Pb, 240pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780691214412

In recent years the study of Chinese folklore has burgeoned after several anthologies of *Zhiguai*, often referred to in historical literature as "records of the strange". These are a curious mix of accounts of paranormal incidents. Often personalised, they resemble Western tall tales of the FOAF (friend-of-a-friend)



kind and, despite sometimes being quite ancient, can have an unnerving modernity, indicating some kind of eternal persistence.

There is another category of tales, *Tonghua*, which are usually regarded as purely fictional, the equivalent of Western fairytales. Juwen Zhang's collection is of this latter sort, focusing upon the publications by Lin Lan that appeared in China in the mid-1920s, and which had its roots in the modernist movement.

In the little history that accompanies this anthology, Zhang shows that "Lin Lan" was a collective pseudonym which collected and retold stories from various regions, making an excellent comparison with the efforts of the Grimm Brothers.

The main motive of the original Lin Lan collective was to bring traditional stories into the modern era and was considerably influenced by their western peers. In this they succeeded

wonderfully, resulting in more than 1,000 stories in 43 volumes which have in turn influenced popular Chinese culture to the present day, including the film industry's thirst for supernatural plots and motifs.

This selection of 42 tales is divided into four groups: the joys (or more usually the tragedies) of falling in love with a fairy; love which is predestined or which tries to overcome fate; love and enmity among siblings; and a generally "weird" category.

A rich spectrum of familiar themes – misidentification and coincidence, jealousy and yearning, greed and envy; treasure found or lost; love that transcends the world or ends in tragedy; and more – are played out by a rich cast of characters: fairies, animals and objects that turn into humanoids and vice versa; supernatural beings from the high heavens and horrible hells; magic users and ghosts; sages and idiots; all presented with a very earthy sense of irony and humour. The whole is an exuberant celebration of humanity and translates beautifully into a joyously fresh read.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

## Chaucer's Pilgrims

ed. Robert Temple

Eglantyne Books 2022

Pb, 84pp, £9.95, ISBN 9781913378028

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is the first book known to have been printed in Britain, by William Caxton in 1476. In 1483 Caxton commissioned woodcuts to illustrate the characters – the Knight, the Prioress, the Miller and all the rest – for a new edition; they were used again in a 1561 edition, but they have never appeared since.

Nearly half a millennium on, a new independent publisher

has brought out a delightful edition of the woodcuts, with Chaucer's description of each character. It doesn't include the Tales themselves, but they're readily available elsewhere.

It's an oddity, clearly produced by an enthusiast – and all the better for it!

Chris Hayhurst

★★★★★





# From dark forests

With erudition, wit and infectious enthusiasm, this illuminating and stunningly illustrated work is a distillation of decades of research

## Gothic

### An Illustrated History

Roger Luckhurst

Thames and Hudson 2021

Hb, 288pp, £28, ISBN 9780500252512

"An Illustrated History" runs the subtitle, but "A Global History" – while perhaps not giving due credit to its stunning images – might also have served as a summary of this illuminating and wide-ranging book.

As Roger Luckhurst sets out in his introduction, the Gothic may be commonly associated with Northern European settings (dark forests, formidable mountains, Victorian cemeteries etc) "but if these are some of its places of origin, it has since exploded across the planet".

To Luckhurst, the Gothic has never been a static form, and its original meaning in architecture and literature has strained at the leash ever since the concept was formalised in the 18th and 19th centuries, eventually escaping original categories and flowing into other cultural spaces. If the term now has a certain ubiquity, for Luckhurst that's a sign not of its immobility but its adaptation.

To uncover how this came about, Luckhurst tracks the shape-shifting nature of the Gothic through a collection of "travelling tropes", arranged into four sections – Architecture & Form, The Lie of the Land, The Gothic Compass, Monsters – each containing five illustrated essays.

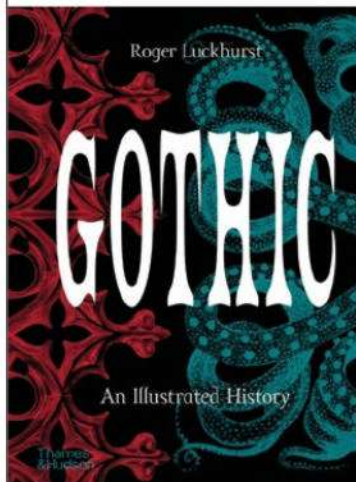
There's a clear thesis throughout, with the author frequently showing how these Gothic tropes shift across time and place, being reinterpreted back and forth from culture to culture.

To take one example, he demonstrates how Lafadio Hearn's early 20th-century English translations of traditional Japanese ghost stories were then reinterpreted and retold back to a Japanese audience in the classic horror film *Kwaidan* (1964), which was directly inspired by Hearn's work.

The book condenses and enlarges on themes from Luckhurst's recent publications.

Architecture & Form builds on and extends the creative reading of familiar spaces that he undertook in his *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* (2019). The analysis of the four cardinal points of The Gothic Compass adds to the cultural constructions of "the East" that he explored in *The Mummy's Curse: The True Story of A Dark Fantasy* (2012), and in the Monsters section, he ends the book by returning to the theme that he expounded upon in *Zombies: A Cultural History* (2015).

This could equate in some writers to "playing the hits", but not here: there's a freshness and concision to the text which is allied to a distillation of decades



of research. With such expansive scope, the book's range of references is dizzying, with TV shows, films, books, contemporary art and computer games abounding.

The essay on the Labyrinth, for instance, begins with the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and ends with the computer game *DOOM* (1993), but on the way takes in the bewildering world of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), art works by Man Ray and Mark Wallinger and the

constrained spaces of *Pac-Man* and *The Shining* (both 1980).

Such rich essays could easily slip into a knotty list of references or a confusing array of disparate strands. But Luckhurst's combination of erudition, wit and infectious enthusiasm ensures this does not happen, and he is as comfortable untangling the roots of the online Slender Man legend as he is on the ruined, fragmentary nature (in poetic style and material form) of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

One natural (if acceptable) challenge with the book is that you are soon breaking off to track down many of Luckhurst's references; or you try to second guess the author, seeking out a relevant book, film or programme he doesn't refer to. No luck there though. I foolishly thought I'd found one when the first series of HBO series *True Detective* (2014) did not turn up in the trawl through the swamps of the Southern Gothic in the Gothic Compass section, only to find it later referenced in the Cosmic Horror essay under a description of the work of Thomas Ligotti, whose short stories formed one of the inspirations for the show's creators.

An erudite overview, a visual pleasure, an educational guessing game... just like the shifting cultural form it describes, *Gothic: An Illustrated History* is many things at once.

Maybe though, with Luckhurst's "travelling tropes" in mind, we could see it as an intellectual travel book, packed with illustrations of strange destinations you may want to visit for the first time, or revisit once again.

It would certainly give the wary traveller advice on what to look out for when journeying into new territory, and would have proved a better guide than a Baedeker, for Jonathan Harker's travels to Castle Dracula...

Ross MacFarlane

★★★★★

## Secret Snakes and Serpent Surprises

Karl PN Shuker

Coachwhip Publications 2022

Pb, 426pp, £21.95, ISBN 9781616465209

This book is a miscellany of serpent natural history and mysteries. Its numerous illustrations include both photographs and line drawings. In addition, there is some snake-related poetry, including some from the author himself.

The book covers a variety of topics, from chapters on the identification of literary snakes to serpent myths and legends as well

as cryptozoological mysteries. From a literary perspective, Shuker discusses the possible identification of the snake in the Sherlock Holmes story "The Speckled Band", and also considers Karait in Kipling's "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi". He devotes a chapter to perhaps the most famous of snakes – the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

The book explores the multitude of myths and legends surrounding snakes, such as snake stones, serpent kings and glycons, the Welsh Beast of Bodalog and the Amphibæna. Serpents figure prominently in the folklore of many cultures; this no doubt speaks to the fear they induce in humankind.

In addition, the author analyses reports of strange and unusual snakes. The natural history of polycephalic serpents is covered, as are reports of gigantic and melanistic snakes.

The book is most interesting where it is examining the cryptozoological aspects of serpents. There are still many reports of snakes in the wild that are unknown to science.

It also presents a wide range of snake-related lore and myth, though the literary and mythical aspects of serpents might have worked better in a separate volume.

I am a great admirer of Shuker's work, but I have to admit that, although I found many interesting aspects to the book, for me it was a bit too much of a quirky combination of cryptozoology, literature, poetry and myth. I would consider this one for the completists.

Sue Hardiman

★★★★





## ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTÉAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

### Aberdeen's Haunted Heritage

Graeme Milne

London Publishing, 2021

Pb, £12.99, 288pp, ISBN 9781914408250

Veteran ghost historian Graeme Milne has published a number of anthologies of Scottish ghosts; this title being an amalgamation of two earlier collections of tales from Aberdeenshire, now revised and expanded. It is refreshing to see a more down-to-earth approach to modern narratives of ghostly encounters – many located in the city itself. Milne writes clearly, without being preachy, and with a genuine attempt to understand such anomalous experiences in humanistic terms; especially whether, in some cases, there is any hint of evidence for post-mortem existence. This is also a very good model of local history writing and investigation, and – wonder of wonders – it has an index.

### Book of Secrets

Aliens, Ghosts and Ancient Mysteries

Brian Allan

Flying Disk Press, 2022

Pb, £10.00, 113pp, ISBN 9798451801499

The publishers claim that readers will be “shocked” by the author’s presentation of “astonishing truths” that will change their perception of reality, our world and its history. However, any reader with the slightest awareness of the 50-year drift of the not-so-secret genres of UFOs, aliens and their ancient Earthly interventions, time travel, conspiracy theories, hybrid children, ghosts, “monstrous Nephilim”, and so on soon realises that this book is nothing less than a rehash of all the above in a slender book. Allan, a veteran ufologist and editor of the online *Phenomena Magazine*, is obviously intelligent and writes well, but his breathless pace and all-encompassing credulity will only appeal to a few like-minded believers, who probably know it all already.

### The Empires of Atlantis The Origins of Ancient Civilizations and Mystery Traditions throughout the Ages

Marco M Vigato

Bear & Company, 2022

Pb, £14.99, 372pp, ISBN 9791591434337

Here we have yet another reworking of old arguments in a familiar field – however Vigato seems to have put time and effort into his researches and so claims his place on the shelf groaning with tomes on Atlantis. Interestingly, Vigato does not follow the “destroyed in a sudden cataclysm” school, but using new as well as historical data he argues that from its earliest origins the ‘Atlantean’ culture had at least three great empires – two of which Vigato believes existed several millennia before the one Plato alludes to – and traces of each of which can be found in various other ‘outpost’ cultures. These revisions employ modern genetic surveys and studies of ‘early civilisation’ sites such as Göbekli Tepe. It is a fresh approach, well-argued, and provocative. Let’s hope it provokes more discussion.

### Tom Sawyer: A Modern-Day Messenger from God His Extraordinary Life and Near-Death Experiences

Daniel Chesbro

Findhorn Press, 2022

Pb, £12.99, 163pp, ISBN 9781789048803

This is not a reincarnation of Mark Twain’s scamp from 1876 (whom Twain modelled on a real local hero of the same name) but the story of how the eponymous Olympic-trained cyclist recovered after a heavily-laden lorry crushed his chest for 15 minutes during an accident. The first thing a reader will notice is the reverential tone of the authors – both ministers of the Baptist cult-like ‘Order of Melchizedek’ which trains teachers. They refer to Sawyer – who died in 2007 – as a “Christ-like... messenger from God”. Their purpose in producing this curious, slender, hagiography is to publicise Saw-

yer’s teachings – around 160 mercifully short think-pieces – said to contain important messages from God with which Sawyer was charged, during his period of unconsciousness, to relay to the world on his return. Much more interesting to *FT* readers are some of the mystical adventures of this Tom Sawyer, such as his account of several out-of-body experiences. His first was the 1987 accident described as a classical Near-Death Experience, including travelling through a tunnel and reviewing his whole life up to the point where he encounters a “being of Light”. Here we find elements of an archaic shamanic spiritual journey dressed up in modern New Age Christianity that reveals, along the way, that neutrinos are, in fact, the ‘Unconditional Love’ particles that make up the body of God.

### Curses, Coincidences & Malign Influence A Parapsychological Perspective

Peter A McCue

Arima Publishing, 2022

Pb, £9.95, 195pp, ISBN 9798404374971

Following closely on Professor Beitmann’s study of coincidences – reviewed recently in **FT424:53**; is this a coincidence? – Dr McCue, also a clinical psychologist as well as a long-time investigator of paranormal and UFO cases and a regular *FT* contributor, presents his own take on the subject, backed up by scads of interesting new first-hand narratives. Having more of a focus upon ‘curses’ and ‘bad luck’, McCue explores the historical context and most likely influence of centuries of folk belief in ‘black magic’ and witchcraft. After surveying cursed objects, the curses by ‘strange children’ (including UFO-related cases), and ‘family curses’, he ends with the modern fascination with celebrity curses spawned by the entertainment industry. While he doesn’t dismiss completely the notion of ‘higher intelligences’, it is clear that some kind of ‘intelligence’ –

including the form often called the ‘Trickster’ – especially in complex cases featuring several different types of phenomena, “is *evidently very resourceful*” and therefore justifiably likened to “a higher intelligence” (his emphasis). Perhaps it has a human origin. There is more detail here in a wide-ranging discussion, making this a valuable reference book on the subject.

### Sky Crash Throughout Time

UFOs, The Reptilian Man & Strange Mysteries Surrounding Rendlesham

Philip Kinsella & Brenda Butler

Flying Disk Press, 2022

Pb, £11.99, 250pp, ISBN 9798403818995

In 1984, veteran ufologist Jenny Randles published *Sky Crash*, one of the crucial investigations of the infamous and complicated UFO-like events that took place in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, in 1980, and based upon the investigations of Brenda Butler and Dot Street. In this new well illustrated volume, the notorious legend of the ‘crashed ufo cover-up’ and the paranormal experiences subsequently reported by various local inhabitants and investigators is retold and much expanded. This is not helped by waffling contributions from spiritualist Philip Kinsella who, through his own ‘close encounters’, has come to believe that aliens were cloning humans without souls. Butler’s biography notes that she was presented with the “Sir Arthur Shuttlewood Award” (whatever that is. We can find no evidence that ‘flying saucer’ pioneer Shuttlewood was ever knighted). One wonders how useful any of this will be, as so much of the credible early investigative work has been deliberately reinterpreted through and dominated by the authors’ subjective theorising about Anunnaki aliens, portals, Skinwalkers and ‘official’ conspiracies. Sadly, the book as a whole is so badly proofed and poorly laid out you hardly notice that it is full of wild and unsubstantiated speculation.



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## Weird and often wonderful

Roddy McDowall's sole directing effort was a very late-Sixties take on a classic Scottish folk ballad – now this weird forgotten gem is back, unearthed by the BFI's Flipside label



### The Ballad of Tam Lin

Dir Roddy McDowall, UK 1971  
BFI, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

How to class *The Ballad of Tam Lin*... It's Folk Horror. It's an Art film. And it's very much of the Sixties.

The film is based at times remarkably closely on the centuries-old song from the Scottish borders in which a young man, Tam Lin, is held in thrall by the Queen of the Fairies; on the night he is about to be sent to Hell, he is rescued by his pregnant young lover, Janet, who drags him off a white horse and holds on to him while he shape-shifts, saving him from the Fairy Queen.

The Queen of the Fairies role is now taken by an incredibly wealthy and manipulative woman, Michaela (Mickey) Cazaret (quite chillingly portrayed by Ava Gardner), who gathers a crowd of upper-class hangers-on, vacuous socialites dedicated to languorous hedonism – including minor characters played by Joanna Lumley and Sinéad Cusack. Tom Lynn (a young, pre-Lovejoy Ian

*"I give you one week's truce – then I'll hunt you down and I'll kill you"*

McShane) is her latest lover. They all head off from Swinging London in Rolls Royces to a huge country house on the borders of Scotland.

In one of her earliest roles, Stephanie Beacham (later in *Dynasty*, *Tenko* and *Coronation Street* among much else) plays Janet, daughter of the local vicar (Cyril Cusack). She and Tom Lynn find a magnetic attraction, and she becomes pregnant. Tom tells Mickey he's leaving her, and she responds: "I give you one week's truce – then I'll hunt you down and I'll kill you. It'll do my heart good!" Avoiding spoilers, suffice to say the remainder of the film is terrifying and nightmarish in its enactment of the song. The white horse is replaced by a white Rolls...

*The Ballad of Tam Lin*, prolific actor Roddy McDowall's sole directorial work, is beautifully

and at times strangely shot, setting the mood with exquisite opening credits, atmospheric landscapes, stretched out scenes, and shifts of colour and timing, including breaking the action at some emotionally critical points with a succession of freeze frames.

The story of Tam Lin was in the air at the time; the song was on Fairport Convention's seminal album *Liege and Lief*, released in 1969. The film uses instead a new version by folk-jazz band Pentangle, who were commissioned to write and perform for the film; they were also in the public view at the time through their song "Light Flight", the delightfully bouncy theme song for the BBC series *Take Three Girls*, first aired in 1969. Oddly, their version of "Tam Lin" and their other song in the film, "The Best Part of You", didn't appear on any Pentangle release until a four-disc retrospective, *The Time Has Come*, in 2008.

Despite being well-funded and having a wealth of talent, the film fell by the wayside, a victim of corporate changes in the film industry; it never really had a UK release, and eventually slipped

out in an inferior cut in the US as the B-movie *The Devil's Widow*. It was saved from vanishing forever by Martin Scorsese, who viewed McDowall's personal print and enabled a VHS release in the US in 1998. This is the first time it's been available in the UK.

Being a BFI Flipside release, there is a host of extras, old and new. There are interviews with, amongst others, Ian McShane and Stephanie Beacham; singer Jacqui McShee talks about Pentangle's involvement in the film; Roddy McDowall comments (in 1998) on Ava Gardner and the making of the film; and then there are three shorts unconnected with Tam Lin except atmospherically.

*The Ballad of Tam Lin* is, frankly, weird but often wonderful, at times disturbing and genuinely scary.

David V Barrett

★★★★★

### The Scary of Sixty-First

Dir Dasha Nekrosova, US 2021  
Out now on 4K UHD, Blu-ray and DVD

In with a bullet at number one in the Most Tasteless Horror Film of the Year award is this dislikeable piece of deliberately provocative trash.

It's a relatively straightforward story about two young women, Noelle and Addie (played by co-writer Madeline Quinn and Betsey Brown respectively), who move into an apartment in New York City and find that it was once owned by an evil criminal. They begin to suspect that terrible things took place there and Addie starts to feel threatened by the malignant atmosphere.

It's no spoiler to reveal that the evil criminal is none other than Jeffrey Epstein, the notorious child abuser, sex trafficker and friend to the rich and famous.





## TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortaen offerings



Graham Hancock has been one of the fixtures of the “alternative archaeology” scene for around 30 years. Following his breakout work, *The Sign and The Seal*, featuring his theories about the Ark of the Covenant, Hancock has been developing his own hypotheses about prehistory. Despite mainstream scepticism (or maybe because of it), he has continued to delve, and his new series *Ancient Apocalypse* (Netflix) is the latest of his expositions.

An opening montage, with an accompaniment of urgent strings, establishes his controversial status among the mainstream, with snippets of the BBC referring him as a “pseudo-archaeologist... dismissed by academics”, a US interview where he’s accused of

picking a fight with academia, Joe Rogan telling him that many of his ideas “have been substantiated”. Then, a tight face shot – “I’m Graham Hancock” – and a quick slideshow of the places he’ll cover in his quest to discover the lost civilisation of the Ice Age. He theorises that there was a large, advanced culture that predated the Indus, Mesopotamian and Egyptian ones which succumbed to some form of disaster prior to what we now regard as recorded history. To test this idea, Hancock dons the standard British TV archaeologist/explorer

*Men in waistcoats and flat caps digging away in far-flung corners*

garb of pale chinos and a shirt with the sleeves rolled up and goes and looks at things, with occasional pointing. Each episode clocks in at around 30 minutes, so they deserve kudos for not calling it Hancock’s Half Hour.

Episode one sees him at the Gunung Padang site on Java – establishing shots of local dress, jeeps, trees, chickens. The Mountain of Light looks like any other jungly hillside but for the thousands of hexagonal basalt blocks at the summit. They are natural volcanic formations, but they’ve been worked and assembled into structures. Further, they didn’t come from here, but from some distance away, and successive digs by local archaeologists have found evidence of habitation and structural work going back a very, very long way indeed – way past the earliest signs of settlement by the now indigenous people. Hancock meets up with local geologist and Peter Lorre lookalike Danny Hillman-Natawidjaja,

to explore the other side, where there’s a huge, near pyramidoid complex. Ground penetrating radar turns up some interesting stuff in the shape of underground chambers. All very familiar from elsewhere on Earth, but it’s the dating that stands out – when this was built, the locals had just got around to poking at things with pointy sticks.

Hancock has been doing this long enough that he knows how to string an argument together and how to keep it focused: he ties it all in nicely with established geological history and local legend along with global mythology. The short running time holds the interest well, and each site – Cholula in Mexico, Gobekli Tepe, Malta – is given a good contextual examination. It does lack any counter-argument, but in fairness to Hancock he gets plenty of that every time he raises his head above the parapet. Whatever you think of his ideas, this is a good, calm and rational showcase.

“Too soon!” I hear you cry, and while you’re almost certainly right, it is a more than sufficiently horrifying story to base a horror film around, albeit one in terribly bad taste.

A third character (played by director and co-writer Dasha Nekrosova), a slightly unhinged conspiracy theorist doing an amateur investigation into Epstein, drives a wedge between Noelle and Addie; the latter also splits with her douchebag boyfriend and becomes increasingly disconnected from reality.

As far as I can tell from the interviews among the extra features, this is all meant to be taken seriously – but until I discovered that, I must confess I wasn’t sure. The opening sequences are reminiscent of those 1980s Italian horror

films that weren’t as good as one from the 1970s – that’s to say, glossy-looking, with attractive but anonymous actors and a dated synth score. Then the characters start conversing, and more than anything the film starts to resemble a hipster mumblecore movie with bored young urbanites talking half-heartedly about their non-problems.

To its credit, the film does quickly take on a life of its own, but the direction it goes in is not one you’d necessarily choose to follow. Allegedly – and I must stress that – one of Epstein’s clients/friends was Prince Andrew and as such he is a strong element in the plot, in some of the most excessive scenes I’ve witnessed in a long time. At one point Addie masturbates furiously while

rubbing pictures of Andy on her crotch, while pretending to be a child, and in another smears menstrual blood on his picture after another furious wank (this time using an Andrew/Fergie royal wedding commemorative ceramic bell!) She also has a J Arthur outside the actual door to Epstein’s former home on 71st Street.

Needless to say, the performances, particularly by Betsey Brown, are committed, but really only in the sex scenes. Otherwise some of the acting is almost laughable. An interview with Brown among the extra features almost suggests that she is indulging her own sexual fantasies. Dark stuff, indeed.

Nekrosova says in her interview that she was heavily influenced by Polanski (another man with criminal

sexual appetites), particularly *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Tenant*, which is obvious. Above all, though, she says Kubrick’s *Eyes Wide Shut* was the main inspiration and that her film takes place in the “extended universe” of that film. I can see the connection, of course – the corrupt, degenerate lives of the super-wealthy – but, aside from the end scene, that idea isn’t really explored. Indeed, those films cited work because they rely on subtlety and atmosphere, not on gore and rough sex. Sometimes, even in horror, less is more.

As it stands, hardly anyone will see this film. However, if someone were to leak a copy to the *Daily Mail* it could become the *Crash de nos jours*.

Daniel King



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# LETTERS

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## Bigfoot in Wigan

I enjoyed the article on “British Bigfeet” [FT425:30-36]. Coincidentally, I only became aware of Bigfoot in Britain about three weeks before the magazine came out. On a walk along the Leeds–Liverpool canal in the vicinity of Haigh Hall to the west of Wigan, I saw a few small posters put up by paranormal researcher Mick McLaren asking if anyone had any weird events to relate. I’d previously seen these around the Rivington area, and so on returning home, I checked him out on google and came across a video ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8mkCQ8ZgLQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8mkCQ8ZgLQ)) where he described a Bigfoot encounter around 1987 at Wigan Flashes – a nature reserve and wetland caused by mining subsidence. I note the ‘W’ motif – Tunbridge Wells, Wallasey, both mentioned in the FT article’s strapline – and now Wigan, and also that one location given in Scotland was in a former mining area; another was by a canal, and indeed, the sighting Mick gives occurred a few miles further along the canal from where I saw his poster.

**Norman Darwen**  
Bolton, Lancashire

## Spectral Horsemen

Fascinating as was Gary Stocker’s letter [FT423:61], quoting an unattributed passage from Aidan Chambers’s *Great British Ghosts* where, in 1914, a British soldier saw not angels but protective horsemen, the indefatigable David Clarke has already noted this in his excellent 2004 book *The Angel of Mons*. Clarke cites the same passage, with this introduction:

“Among the columns of British troops moving towards the Marne was ‘a distinguished Lieutenant-Colonel’. In a letter published by the London *Evening News* in September 1915, he described how his division came into action at dawn and fought until dusk, under constant shelling from German artillery until the order came to withdraw from Le Cateau.”

It was following this that the ‘phantom’ horsemen were seen. A note on this letter states more



This willow tree in South Kyme, Lincolnshire, was struck by lightning a couple of years ago. “The remaining stump,” writes John Winter, “does a good impression of Groot’s cousin sitting and waiting near the riverbank.”

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times**, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com)

specifically that it appeared in the *Evening News* on 14 September 1915. Clarke also mentions that as General Sordet’s French cavalry corps were moving towards Le Cateau to support the British at this time, it is possible this was what the correspondent and his companions saw.

However, Clarke also cites a similar but rather more prosaic account:

“Later in 1915 [11 August] Lance Corporal A. Johnstone, of the Royal Engineers, wrote to the London *Evening News* to describe more phantom horsemen seen during the retreat that were distinctly hallucinatory rather than real. He said:

“We had almost reached the end of the retreat, and, after

marching a whole day and night with but one half-hour’s rest in between, we found ourselves on the outskirts of Langy, near Paris, just at dawn, and as the day broke we saw in front of us large bodies of cavalry all formed up in squadrons – fine, big men, on massive chargers. I remember turning to my chums in the ranks and saying “Thank God! We are not far off Paris now. Look at that French cavalry!” They, too, saw them quite plainly, but on getting closer, to our surprise the horsemen vanished and gave place to banks of white mist, with clumps of trees and bushes dimly showing through them! Quite a simple illusion, yet at the time we actually picked out the lines of man and horse as plainly as possible,

and almost imagined we heard the champing of the horses’ bits! When I tell you that hardened soldiers who had been through many a campaign were marching quite mechanically along the road and babbling all sorts of nonsense in sheer delirium, you can well believe we were in a fit state to take a row of beanstalks for all the saints in the calendar.”

**Gail-Nina Anderson**  
Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear

The first reference I saw to WWI spectral horsemen was in Kevin McClure’s booklet *Visions of Bowmen and Angels* (Wild Places Special, 1994).

It has to be said that large numbers of soldiers on the exhausting retreat from Mons ‘saw’ all sorts of things and affected their comrades. John F Lucy described this in his memoir *There’s a Devil in the Drum*:

“Some, as I have said, did not know if they were waking or dreaming and they mixed up fact and fancy. This resulted one day in the whole company believing that we were all entraining within an hour. It afterwards transpired that this was all due to the vapourings of a dreamy corporal attached to battalion headquarters whose persistent phantom was a column of armoured trains.” And there are similar stories in Frank Richards’s classic memoir *Old Soldiers Never Die*.

David Clarke published a book on the Angels of Mons (Wiley 2004), and there’s also James Hayward’s *Myths and Legends of the First World War* (Sutton 2002). FT has published several articles on the subject, of course.

My twopence worth is to agree with Arthur Machen that someone misunderstood and misquoted his story ‘The Bowmen’, which appeared in the *Evening News* (29 Sept 1914). It was probably a parson, and as a preacher myself I know you don’t always quote the sources of your anecdotes, or perhaps get them right. The story went viral in 1915, and no one has ever found any verifiable source for ‘angels’ before March that year.

**George Featherston**  
By email

# LETTERS

## Banana footnote



As a footnote to my research on the Space Liberate story [FT55:33, 390:45, 408:32-39], here are two recently unearthed rare cartoons from the late 1980s from local Alabama newspapers. While there is no mention per se of flamboyant pianist Liberate coming out of a UFO, these cartoons seem to be early references to the ongoing Fyffe incident.

Jeffrey Vallance, *By email*



## Ghostwatch

Stu Neville's feature on *Ghostwatch* at 30 and Jon Dear's equally illuminating personal recollections of the broadcast [FT424:46-49] gave me the push that I needed to pluck up the courage to watch it again, and on 22 October I attended a screening at Newcastle-upon-Tyne's Star & Shadow cinema.

I have avoided rewatching it all these years for a variety of reasons, not least that on first broadcast I was eight years old and utterly terrified. In the years prior to the broadcast there had been schoolyard tales of ghosts and ghouls that were simply daft fun, except for a girl who told us about a poltergeist in her house. Grey ladies and headless monks were creepy but ephemeral, offering a controlled way for us to safely scare ourselves and move on. I think one of the important roles these sorts of tales play is for people to learn to manage emotional responses in a controlled environment – but poltergeist stories were of a different order. They were told in nervous whispers as if the telling would give the entity more power and the phenomena would intensify. That particular aspect of poltergeist lore deeply af-

fected me, so after being unable to sleep following *Ghostwatch*, there was no way I was going to talk to anyone about it.

Years went by and memories faded, but certain key images remained burned into my mind, frankly, as fundamental childhood horrors. Other TV shows were revisited via reruns, VHS & DVD releases and deconstructed through fanzines and books, so my original memories of these shows were overlaid by memories of later viewings and tinged by critical reviews – but *Ghostwatch* was never repeated and very little was written about it, so those memories remained pure.

I read briefly about the broadcast on its 20th anniversary but decided not to revisit it at that stage, partly due to a worry that it might not live up to my childhood memories and partly due to a certain cold sweat that spread across my shoulders when thinking about it.

I am glad that for 30th anniversary I finally took the dive. At the screening I attended, it was heartening to hear others of a similar age talk about their similar memories, aversion to discussing the broadcast at the time and the enduring impact it had on them. It was also reassuring

to see that I remembered things much more accurately than I expected and, for the most part, it stood the test of time. Aside, that is, from the attempt to make hints at Pipe's backstory more explicit, which give us crude caricatures of mental illness and transphobia. But, 30 years on, I am glad to be able to finally start to think more critically about the work, flaws and all.

I also think there is more to be said about the difference between responses to *Ghostwatch* and to more recent shows such as *Most Haunted* or even YouTube series such as *Buzzfeed Unsolved* or *Ghost Files*. A lot of the complaints about *Ghostwatch* came, as Jon Dear pointed out in his article, from embarrassment at having been drawn in. In the years since, viewers have become increasingly media literate. I don't believe that viewers of the vast array of ghost hunting shows now on offer are any more or less credulous; but there is a certain element of postmodern play about how these shows are viewed. Whereas a certain section of *Ghostwatch*'s audience was angry at being duped, the contemporary ghost hunt audience is very much invited in.

Greg Maughan  
*Sunderland, Tyne & Wear*

*Ghostwatch* conjured for me the love-hate relationship I've had with television my whole life. As far as *Ghostwatch* goes, I do recall seeing in the papers that it was, in quotation marks, "a drama", but this was swiftly overridden by my naive magical thinking when the show came on. I was sucked in, although I did think it odd that a serious paranormal investigation would involve Craig Charles interviewing people about neighbourhood dog mutilations, since he was familiar to me from *Red Dwarf*.

The late Eighties and early Nineties were a weird time to grow up, around burgeoning visual entertainment technology. For example, my parents accidentally hired 'Forbidden World', a Roger Corman horror film, from our video rental emporium 'Golden Disc', because they had confused the title with the Disney sci fi 'Forbidden Planet' with Leslie Nielsen! And then I was sent to a

boarding school where an inappropriately BBFC-certificated horror VHS was screened for the house every Wednesday night. To this day I wonder if that counts as grooming, since 'Flatliners' is hardly family-friendly viewing. I mean, I enjoyed a PG film as much as anyone, and back in the day school playgrounds I found, to my shock, other kids asking me if I'd seen 'I Spit on Your Grave!'

Not to mention that visiting friends' houses I would find them watching something deplorable like 'Death Wish' (the dad fast-forwarded the inappropriate scene), 'Booby-Trap' (I didn't see the end, so felt compelled to hunt it down as an adult), or 'Spookies' where a monster melts a lady's face off. Is that folk horror? Am I walking wounded or 'Scarfolk'? I found out at the time that 'Ghostwatch' had resulted in "the first childhood death from television-induced PTSD".

James Wright  
*Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex*

Stu Neville's article commemorating the 30th anniversary of *Ghostwatch* inevitably touches on the influence of the Enfield poltergeist case. In an interview with Neville, writer Stephen Volk downplays the connection, maintaining "the setting was about as far as it went." Enfield investigator Guy Lyon Playfair would have disagreed with this statement, as he noted a strong resemblance.

In an article in the SPR's *Paranormal Review*, 'The Enfield Saga: From *This House is Haunted* (1980) to *The Enfield Haunting* (2015)' (issue 75, summer 2015, pp.26-7) Playfair says that an account of the Enfield poltergeist's journey from page to screen would fill a book, and he sketches its contents. A chapter would be devoted to *Ghostwatch*.

He describes the consequences of the transmission in gleeful terms: "Chapter 3. The BBC shows *Ghostwatch*, a hoax 'documentary' rather obviously (in my opinion) based on my book [*This House is Haunted*] and infringing my copyright. Legal action is taken; I get an out-of-court settlement and a well-earned free holiday." I'm surprised Neville didn't think to challenge Volk on his claim.

Tom Ruffles  
*Impington, Cambridge*



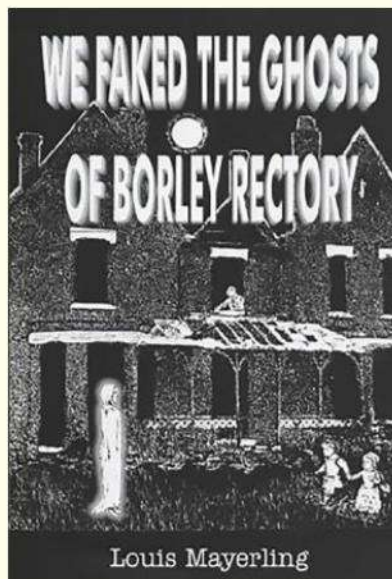
## Complete imposter

Norman Darwen [FT423:62] is correct in stating the reason I did not mention Louis Mayerling/George Carter in my article on Lawrence of Arabia is because the book *We Faked the Ghosts of Borley Rectory* is a fantasy from start to finish. Fortunately, most people seem to have realised this for themselves, save for one or two individuals who ought to have known better (such as journalist Amelia Hill, who uncritically published Mayerling's claims under the headline 'Hoaxer's Confession lays the famed ghosts of Borley' – *Guardian*, 30 Dec 2000).

The only possible connection I concede which might have existed between Mayerling and Borley – and this is only mere suspicion on my part – is that he previously went under another alias, 'John May', a man who claimed to have visited Borley in 1947 (eight years after the infamous rectory burned down). During the 1940s and 1950s a John May presented himself as a ghost hunter and exorcist in West Suffolk, earning himself mentions in several popular ghost books. I wonder if he was actually the younger Mayerling/Carter?

On 30 December 1949 the *Bury Free Press* in West Suffolk reported that items of ladies' clothes (never those of men) were disappearing from washing lines, houses and bicycles in the hamlet of Farthing Drove, situated in the Fens north-west of Lakenheath and Thetford. These disappearances had been going on for some 18 months. Oddly enough, money and other valuables were left untouched. A local man told of seeing the ghost of a woman in a red scarf accompanied by a curly haired little girl in the area some years before, and there was a story that a young girl had drowned in a dyke near the plantation. Another rumour was that people avoided walking along the river bank near Ollets Mill from fear that a ghost might push them in the water. The implication was that a troublesome spirit was also responsible for stealing the clothes, though a more probable explanation for the thefts many might think were that they were the work of a frustrated sexual fetishist in the area.

On 6 January 1950, the *Bury Free Press* published a letter from a John May of Little Livermere, who claimed considerable experience in the occult and magic, and who labelled the phenomena the work of a playful poltergeist. May stated that if the ghost was malevolent it would actually have pushed people in the dyke or bruised them. He announced he was ready to cycle to Farthing Drove and



## "Mayerling's book is a fantasy from start to finish"

carry out an exorcism. Soon after, on 14 January 1950, the *Free Press* reported he had carried out an exorcism ritual drawn from a 14th century manuscript and using salt and butter. This left him feeling drained afterwards. John May said he was the son of an agricultural worker from Norton, lived with his mother at Little Livermere, and that aged 17 he had left home to become a ballet dancer in Budapest, later performing in Albania and Rome. Returning to England he had then joined the Guards Regiment and served in North Africa and Italy. This has echoes of some of Mayerling's later claims.

A John May is also referenced in Alasdair Alpin MacGregor's *The Ghost Book* (1955), with stories of a killer phantom cyclist near Lakenheath, and in *The Ghosts of Borley* (1973) by Peter Underwood and Paul Tabori. The latter quotes a 'John May' and extracts of a letter sent to Peter Underwood in April 1950, claiming various experiences near Borley Church.

After the publication of *We Faked the Ghosts of Borley Rectory* in 2000, ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) corresponded

with Mayerling and enjoyed several telephone conversations. Mayerling claimed knowledge on a wide range of subjects with many stories or anecdotes featuring himself at the centre. No corroboration, documentation or other supporting evidence was provided.

Green was on the whole rather amused by him, going on to receive various unsolicited letters and manuscripts from Mayerling over the next six months. In these ramblings, frequently spiced with supposedly true gossip concerning famous personalities, Mayerling exhibited an eccentric and free-associating black humour. Green specifically asked if he was John May or knew him; Mayerling admitted knowing of him but added no further comment.

Green was also subjected to examples of Mayerling's poetry; fortunately it seems none has survived. From what I saw of it, this mostly consisted of vulgar doggerel, stylistically bowdlerising verses from classic poems (e.g. the metre of Blake's 'The Tyger' adopted for a poem mocking persons suffering the symptoms of dysentery in a hot climate). Another distinct oddity was a poem utilising the symbol of a lost and dying dog, purportedly to memorialise Mayerling's former wife, whom he told Green had perished in a concentration camp.

Frankly with such a fantasy-prone character, I feel no reliance can safely be placed on any syllable Mayerling uttered. Cases like his serve as a warning whenever researchers are faced with individuals recounting numerous extraordinary tales and experiences lacking corroboration, a reminder that there are people who have an inordinate love of lying for its own sake. The late Colin Bennett once declared as a forteen maxim "There is no such thing as a complete imposter" – but Mayerling certainly had a good go at it.

**Alan Murdie**  
Leith, Edinburgh



"Ah well! I'm afraid you've got me there... It really is nine tenths of the law."

# IT HAPPENED TO ME...

## SAY SUMMA NUMMA

The meat of this story took place in the spring and summer of 2021. It was an unusual time, as my family and I had a cluster of odd experiences, although I'll only describe a couple here. Some of my siblings have had distinctly abnormal experiences as children, and half of my family come from a part of the world where the supernatural is more accepted as a part of life than it is here.

The root of the following sequence of events lies in a memory of the early 1990s, when I was around seven years old. I was in a Mini Cooper with my aunt and two younger siblings, twin brother and sister. On the radio played a song that we three siblings found hilarious, as a man seemed to be singing "Say summa numma". I'm sure we joked about it a lot afterwards, but it had certainly faded from our memories by the time we reached adolescence, and we had no cause to discuss – or even think about – it in the ensuing years.

Fast forward to the spring of 2021, and our extended family had gathered to celebrate my oldest brother's 50th birthday. At one point during the gathering, I sat with my two younger siblings, my brother, out of the blue, brought up the memory of that song. We had a brief debate over the make of my aunt's car and the lyrics of the song, before moving on.

Fast forward again to summer 2021, and my two younger siblings along with my mother had come to visit me for my birthday. We happened to find ourselves discussing the paranormal, as my sister had recently visited a medium out of curiosity after reading about her in the Leslie Keane book *Surviving Death*, or seeing the TV series. We came to the conclusion that the medium's more accurate declarations had probably been the result of hot reading, i.e. Googling.

Things took a stranger turn when we went out for a meal at an Italian restaurant, as we had



DANIELLE DK / WIKIMEDIA

## "ON THE RADIO PLAYED A SONG THAT WE THREE SIBLINGS FOUND HILARIOUS"

not long been seated before the 'Say summa numma' song began to play on the sound system. We were struck by how odd this was, since none of us had heard the song since early childhood, and we had been discussing it when we had last met a couple of months before. We had no joy asking the staff what song it was, so my brother tried using a song recognition app on his phone. He was interrupted two or three times in this effort by a friend trying to phone him up. He eventually succeeded in identifying it as "Senza Una Donna", by Zucchero, an Italian musician I had never heard of [pictured above]. My brother, on the other hand, had heard of him. Some days before he had asked his friend, a musician, and the same friend who had interrupted him by trying to call him today, about his profile picture on a social media account. The friend had explained that the photo was taken at a gig many years ago, when he had toured

as the drummer for Zucchero!

I should probably outline an overlapping abnormal experience. As mentioned above, my sister had been to see a medium, whom we had assumed was a fraud. She had made a few accurate-sounding references to deceased family members, but we felt she could have discovered this information by searching the Internet.

However, one statement we found more difficult to understand: a description of a man who seemed to be our late father, a GP, telling my sister to beware of inflammation on our mother's leg. This didn't mean much to us, as our mother had no such problem. However, two months after my birthday gathering, my sister travelled down to stay with my mother. This would be the first time they'd met since the gathering. As it happened, this visit coincided with my mother developing sepsis from cellulitis on her leg. She was taken to hospital only because my sister was staying with her at the time, and thankfully survived this life-threatening illness.

This all led us to wonder whether we had given the medium less credit than she deserved.

**Magnus (surname on file)**  
*By email*

## THAT'S THE TICKET!

I live in a small village in Arctic Norway. Every three or four weeks I take the bus into the nearest 'city' to stock up on essentials like freshly ground coffee and French goat cheese. One excursion took place on 14 May 2007. On the way home, I saw a small yellow ticket lying on the seat in front of me, and as it was unlike the much larger white tickets issued on board, I assumed it had originated elsewhere and been dropped by a tourist. I noticed that the year of issue seemed to be 1967, so I picked it up. Not only was it dated 1967, but the date of issue was 14 May. Unless a daimon had been at play, someone not only kept a used ticket in virtually pristine condition for four decades, and either lost or deliberately left it on a modern bus 40 years later to the very day. It bothers me immensely that I will probably never know the story behind this.

**Craig Colley**  
*Stam sund, Norway*

## BACKWARDS WRITING

It was 1994 and my wife and I, and our two young children (aged six and four) were moving in to a new house. It was a Victorian



house, which needed a lot of renovation work. We moved out of our old house and in to the new one (which we frankly could barely afford!) and did the work while we lived in it – essentially camping in the living room until the other rooms became habitable.

We discovered quite a damp problem in one of the bedrooms and the staircase. Upon stripping off the lime plaster and exposing the wooden lath underneath, we found a void behind the wall. We used a torch to look between the gaps in the wooden lath strips and there looked to be a room/space the full height of the room, but only about 3ft (90cm) deep, as you could see the exterior brickwork. We stripped off the lath as it was damp (to replace with modern materials) and exposed a small space where you could walk in and remain standing and just about turn around in.

The strangest part was that when we exposed the wall it was covered in what looked like backwards writing. It was all over the walls and floor, but it all appeared to be random letters and nonsense and looked to be drawn in coal/charcoal on the exposed brick. It didn't seem to be in any obvious language that we could recognise. There was also a drawing of two large people and two small people (eerily reminiscent of our family of four), which was the creepiest part of it all. Being a bit superstitious, we left it all well alone and blocked up the void again, replacing the plaster as had been the plan.

We have since moved house, but I often think about that void, who created the markings and why, and if anyone will ever look at it again.

**Greg Ogilvie**  
*By email*

## FUNERAL SILENCE

Regarding Daniel Clay's report of an "odd silence" while walking beside a waterfall [FT424:65]: I have experienced an unexpected "odd" silence, but one I would be more inclined to describe as "eerie", and which

happened under rather different circumstances.

It happened during one of the Covid lockdown periods, when there were strict limits on numbers permitted at funeral services and other gatherings. One of my partner's friends had sadly passed away from cancer. My partner wanted to go to the cemetery, where mourners could gather for the short graveside service whilst maintaining social distance. I had dropped her off at the graveyard quite early, before the church service was due to start, as there was anticipated to be a fair number of mourners present, then drove off and parked in a lay-by about half a mile from the cemetery, near the bottom of the road connecting the church to the graveyard.

It was a bright, sunny, summer morning. I stretched my legs on the adjacent park area, enjoying the sunshine and fresh air. The Glasgow/Edinburgh train line ran past only a few hundred yards from where I was walking. The road I was parked on leads directly to the M8 motorway, and so generally has fairly heavy traffic. An HGV haulier firm has its main depot nearby. I was aware of the sound of birds singing, of dogs barking, of cattle lowing on nearby farms. I could hear lawnmowers and people shouting greetings at one another. The general, ambient background noise of a normal small Lanarkshire town surrounded me. After walking the perimeter of the park, I returned to my car and sat in the driver's seat, with the windows fully wound down to let in some fresh air, and the background sounds along with it. I checked my phone, then either fired up my scrabble game or browsed social media.

After a few minutes of this, I was suddenly aware that the background sounds had stopped. Not just lowered, or faded; there was a blanketing, pervading, total silence. It was tangible. No traffic, no birds, no dogs, no lawnmowers. Nothing. Almost instinctively, I looked in the rear-view mirror and saw the funeral cortège come in to

view at the bottom of the road. The silence continued, until the approaching hearse could be heard. I got out of the car to stand, paying my respects, and while the cortège could be heard, there was still almost no other sound. Once the cortège had passed, the background noises returned, as normal.

I went back to sit in the car, but that silence stayed on my mind. It was an uncanny experience – as if the surroundings had intentionally fallen silent as a mark of respect. The silence was an almost palpable thing – it was so pervasive as to be noticeable, a distinct shift from the background noise and hubbub. The fact that it seemed to herald the cortège gave it an added edge of eeriness.

**Stan Sweeney**  
*Lanarkshire*

## BASINGSTOKE MONK

Around 1988, after a night out in Basingstoke with my friend, we decided to take a shortcut to go home through our old school – The Wyne Comprehensive School, which is now The Wyne Community School. The tarmac playground at the centre of the school was covered by a low mist 20cm (8in) above the ground. Over on the opposite side of the playground we saw a hooded figure that looked like a monk. It was moving towards the Queen Mary's buildings side of the school and, due to the mist, it seemed to be floating. After what seemed an age, we finally got ourselves moving and quickly walked to the left of the figure and exited the school grounds. When I looked back over my shoulder the figure was still there.

The Wyne School was a merger in 1970 of Queen Mary's School for Boys and Charles Chute Grammar School, located next door to each other. Queen Mary's School owes its origins to a Charter given by Queen Mary in 1559. Sometime afterwards, I did hear that a ghost had been seen before in the school, but it may have been my own story

going around and coming back to me.

**Simon Jones**  
*Hyvinkää, Finland*

## SCOTTER ROAD

I'm an archaeologist and, in July 2022, I had to carry out a walkover survey of land at Brumby Common West, just off Scotter Road, Scunthorpe, for a pre-excavation desk-based assessment.

When I got home, the latest FT had arrived, with a photo of the Scotter Road viaduct taken from the junction of Scotter Road and Brumby Wood Lane [FT421:43] – precisely where I'd got out of the taxi from Scunthorpe station a few hours before. Now, a couple of months later, FT423 included a story about an archaeologist who felt "impending gloom and dread" while digging on Brumby Common West and there's a photo of the gate into the woods that I'd used when making the site visit [FT423:43]. Coincidence? Yes. Strange? Definitely!

I do a lot of walkover surveys, so I'm used to being alone in the middle of nowhere and I didn't feel anything amiss during that site visit, other than the stench of decay from a dead deer in the edge of the wood. However, the background research for the site turned up 18th- and 19th-century references to ghost lights in the marshes that were on Brumby Common West before the field drains were dug, while one of the prehistoric causeways across the Common terminated less than a mile away on the east bank of the Trent, at a place that was called 'Boggard Hall' on an 1822 OS surveyor's plan. One 19th-century account described the Common as a very marshy area where "blown sand forms low hills and mounds and occurs in a labyrinth of irregular patches of swampy ground". Not difficult to see how strange things might happen in such a desolate place.

**Mark Stenton**  
*Sheffield, South Yorkshire*

# Fortean Traveller



## 134. Los Angeles Central Library

**BRIAN J ROBB** visits a municipal Temple of Knowledge in Los Angeles and asks if its builders deliberately encoded it with esoteric and Luciferian symbolism...



ABOVE: A view of the Los Angeles Central Library in 1971. BELOW: Architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue.

There are few municipal buildings quite like the Los Angeles Central Library at 630 West Fifth Street. Now an important landmark in crowded downtown Los Angeles, the public library was built in 1926. It's a distinctive building that may be the physical manifestation of occult esoteric knowledge. For tourists, its unique look is simply described as being inspired by "ancient Egyptian and Mediterranean revival architecture". So far, so *Architectural Digest*: the 1920s did see a boom in Egyptian-inspired architecture following Howard Carter's exhumation of Tutankhamun in 1922. However, beneath the surface, there are a host of hidden meanings and intentions encoded into the architecture and decoration of the LA Central Library building.

### *Goodhue belonged to several secret societies*



Only those who know what they're looking for, perhaps a secret elite rather than the masses, are able to see the true meaning of the library's symbolic art.

The key architect behind the library was Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, who was part of the Arts and Crafts movement of late 19th century Boston. He and business partner Ralph Adams Cram belonged to several secret societies, including the Pewter Mugs (a drinking and literary society for Boston's bohemian crowd) and the Visionists (artists, poets, and writers into Spiritualism and the supernatural). Goodhue and Cram also published *The Knight Errant* magazine from 1892.

Goodhue soon moved into architecture, pioneering

the American Neo-Gothic movement of the early-20th century. Among the buildings he helped design and build were Saint Thomas Church on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue and the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel of the University of Chicago. Goodhue also designed the headquarters for the Wolf's Head Society, a Yale University secret society similar to the Freemasonry-inspired Skull and Bones. German-born sculptor Lee Lawrie worked with Goodhue on several projects, including the Rockefeller and the LA library. Lawrie's best-known work is the bronze Atlas sculpture in front of Manhattan's Rockefeller Center.

When Goodhue won the contract to build LA's brand new public library, the brief included directions that the building should provide "illumination through the light of learning". That was all the encouragement Goodhue and Lawrie needed to indulge their occult interests. The esoteric and spiritual undertones encoded in the fabric of the library made the resulting building a temple of illumination, perhaps in ways beyond those intended by the building's commissioners. In its architectural and decorative detail, the library is stacked with elements of sacred geometry, mystic symbolism, and allusions to important works of occult literature.

At the very top of the complex is a decorated pyramid topped off by an extended golden arm holding aloft the flaming 'torch of illumination'. The pyramid had an important role to play in occult symbolism, being a link between the material world and the spiritual plane. Each of the four triangular sides of this pyramid feature elaborate solar symbols, with adoration of the Sun one of the earliest forms of religious expression, while the torch that tops off the pyramid suggests Luciferian influences at work.

The Latin meaning of 'Lucifer' is simply 'light bearer', with such illumination (usually through fire) representing esoteric divine knowledge and enlightenment. The





**ABOVE LEFT:** The impressive chandelier representing the Earth surrounded by the signs of the zodiac. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Library's pyramid roof, topped by a hand holding aloft the 'torch of illumination'. **BELOW:** The figures of 'Phosphor' and 'Hesper' hold scrolls bearing the names of Eastern and Western thinkers.

human (though golden) arm holding the torch suggests mankind's ascendancy to illumination through occult knowledge. At the base, there is a snake winding around the torch bearer's arm. Where Christianity sees Lucifer (the fallen angel, the Devil, or Satan) and the snake (as in the Garden of Eden) as negative symbols, in the Gnostic reading of the Bible, the serpent (representing Lucifer) is a positive figure, gifting humanity with the intellect (or knowledge) to allow reason and so to ascend to divinity. Luciferianism is central to Goodhue's designs, representing the search for enlightenment through knowledge.

Lawrie's sculptures adorning the western facade of the Library continue the theme begun by the pyramid at the top. Two human figures are labelled 'Phosphor' and 'Hesper', while below and between them is the sculpted image of two horsemen passing a torch. Above in Latin is the line: "Like runners they pass on the lamp of life". Phosphor is related to the 'morning star' or the 'bringer of light', better known as the planet Venus (the source of numerous UFO reports) – both phrases also connect to Lucifer. Hesper (or Vesperus) signifies the opposite time of day, the 'evening star', once again Venus. Both figures hold what appear

to be unrolled scrolls adorned with various names. Phosphor's scroll features such Eastern philosophers as Buddha, Zoroaster, and Moses, while Hesper's lists Western thinkers like Kant, Socrates, and Bacon.

These figures are key names associated with the school of thought dedicated to preserving, protecting, and perpetuating mystery teachings, something the entire edifice of the LA Central Library appears dedicated to. This hidden or occult knowledge (the 'torch of light') is passed down from generation to generation, usually through secret societies.

In this case, public library users are surrounded by the signs and symbols of the Mystery School, though many may simply be unaware of the deeper meanings in plain sight. This western facade is now the main entrance to the library, welcoming initiates into the cult. It is designed to emulate the ruined temples of ancient Egypt, creating an impressive processional approach that recalls Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Thebes. A series of shallow pools and water features dot the area immediately in front of this entrance, on Flower Street,

making for a monumental approach to the library.

While these exterior clues may be easily overlooked, the interior of the library is more blatant in its distribution of occult signs and symbols. Designed by Goodhue and built by Lawrie, and hanging directly below the pyramid that tops the structure, is a one-ton golden Earth globe chandelier made of cast bronze. The 'light of knowledge' theme is continued in the surrounding ring made up of the signs of the zodiac, illuminated by 48 individual lights. This ring is attached by chains to a sunburst





pattern painted on the ceiling above. There's another Gnostic interpretation possible here, that of the 'circle of the illuminated', the Archons or 'hidden rulers' of the planet. In 1933, the walls surrounding the chandelier were illustrated with a series of murals by the artist Dean Cornwell, encompassing the theme of civilisation through the history of California.

Dotted throughout the interior of the library there are a variety of interesting features and sculptures just waiting to be decoded by those who are illuminated or have been initiated into the secrets of the Mystery School. Across a chessboard patterned floor is an alcove within which resides the Statue of Civilisation, flanked on either side by a sphinx. In the statue's left hand is a flaming torch (more illumination), while her right holds an open book that contains a series of quotes connected with Freemasonry. The panel that forms the front of the statue's robe contains a series of graphic illustrations recounting the rise of civilisation. The bottom panel is empty, signifying mankind's unknown deep past (or the lost civilisation of Atlantis in some readings). Moving upwards, also depicted are the Egyptian pyramids, Phœnician ships, representations of Minoan, Greek, and Roman civilisation, as well as icons of China (dragon) and India (Siva). Notre Dame encapsulates mediæval Europe, while buffalo, a covered wagon, and the Liberty Bell represent the newer civilisation of the United States of America.

Each of the guardian sphinxes, made of black-veined Belgian marble with bronze headdresses, symbolise the hidden mysteries of knowledge and control the approach to 'civilisation'. Each carries quotes from Plutarch's *Morals*, which, once again, have greater meaning within a Masonic context. The suggestion here is that secret societies (of the kind Goodhue belonged to), the guardians of mysterious lost knowledge (like the sphinxes), have controlled and guided the evolution of humankind from behind-the-scenes – and continue to do so.

At the library's central point, there is an eight-sided Star of Ishtar embedded in the floor. The Assyrian and Babylonian figure of Ishtar is the Goddess of fertility, love, war, and sexuality and is also seen as "the divine personification of the planet



Venus". The Star is located on the floor because it is symbolic of 'katabasis', the descent into the underworld: it's no coincidence those sphinxes sit either side of a descending stairway. The most widely known examples of katabasis are the descents of Odysseus, Orpheus and Ishtar (in Mesopotamian myth) into the underworld, the land of the dead.

Much of this symbolism is related to Freemasonry or the Illuminati – but that doesn't mean that their inclusion was part of some Masonic plot: sometimes, a sunburst is just a sunburst. Could either Goodhue or Lawrie have been Masons or members of the Illuminati, determined to display their powerful connections through hidden images that could only be interpreted by those in the know? Perhaps, in the fiction of Dan Brown, but in the real world there is no available evidence that either man was a member of any Masonic lodge. Was the inclusion of Freemason and Illuminati symbols by accident or by design? After all, there is no sign of the basic Masonic symbol of the compass-and-square (maybe Goodhue didn't want to be that obvious?).

It seems much more likely that the iconography of the Central Library came about as part of Los Angeles' early-20th century 'cultural cringe'. The city was growing and taking on new importance in the US, especially with the arrival of the movie industry in what became Hollywood. This was a period when great architects were intent upon the erection of elegant neo-classical monuments. Given that the public library was seen as a tool of moral improvement, would it be a stretch to say that then-culturally-poor Los Angeles was over-compensating by creating a library building that in its very fabric worshipped learning itself? Goodhue himself didn't live long enough to see the completion of the Library in 1926. He died suddenly two years earlier of a heart attack at the age of just 54, leaving others to implement his occult designs.

Given the symbolism of light and fire that pervades the library building, it is perhaps ironic (or not surprising at all) that the site should fall prey to a devastating fire. A 1975 article forewarned of such an eventuality, with historian and novelist John D Weaver (in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*) calling the library building "an antiquated

LEFT: Dean Cornwell's murals showing the history of California. BELOW LEFT: Two sphinxes flank a descending staircase.

firetrap". The fire – seemingly the result of arson – broke out among the stacks in the mid-morning of 29 April 1986. The building was quickly evacuated, but the fire burned for over seven hours, destroying 400,000 books (about 20 per cent of the total stocks). Significant water and smoke damage affected a further 700,000 books. The very structure of the building served to prolong the fire and reduce firefighter access. Replacing the lost books was estimated to cost in the region of \$14 million. As a result, the library was closed for seven years for extensive renovation (including a major expansion with the addition of a new wing), re-opening in October 1993. No-one was ever charged with starting the fire (an arrested suspect was released), but one good thing did emerge from the inferno – an extensive cataloguing project uncovered a Shakespeare Fourth Folio among the library's forgotten holdings.

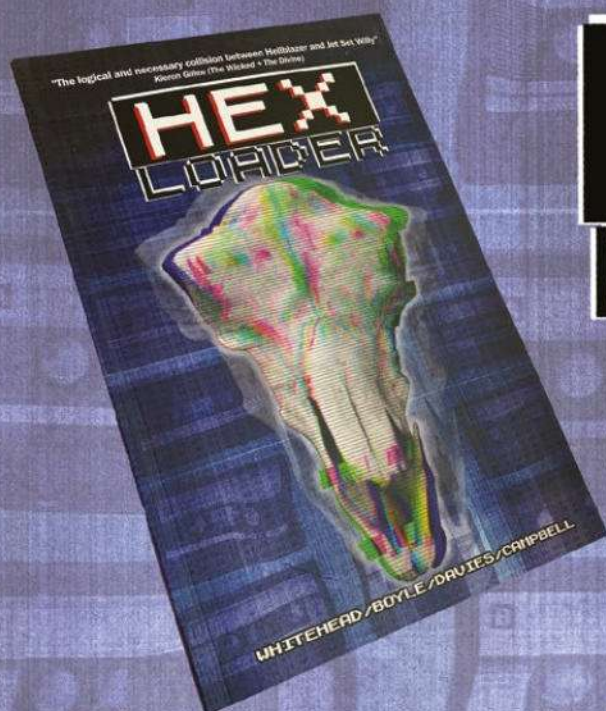
Iconographer and philosophy professor Hartley Burr Alexander worked with Goodhue and Lawrie in establishing the theme that was to inform their decoration of the LA library. Writing in 1927, Alexander explained his basic premise: "Light and learning are associated together by an impulse so natural that it pervades the great literature of the world. Knowledge is imagined as a lamp, wisdom as a guiding star, and the conscious tradition of mankind as a torch passed from generation to generation."

Were Goodhue, Lawrie, and Alexander simply exploring the iconography of knowledge (or 'illumination') in their scheme for the Los Angeles Central Library, or where they up to something altogether more esoteric in their use of Luciferian symbolism? Perhaps they really were just using light as a metaphor for knowledge: after all, what better symbolism could there be for a great public library?

♦♦ **BRIAN J ROBB** is the author of books on Philip K Dick and Walt Disney, and a guide to Tolkien's Middle-earth. He is a Founding Editor of the *Sci-Fi Bulletin* website and a regular contributor to *FT*.



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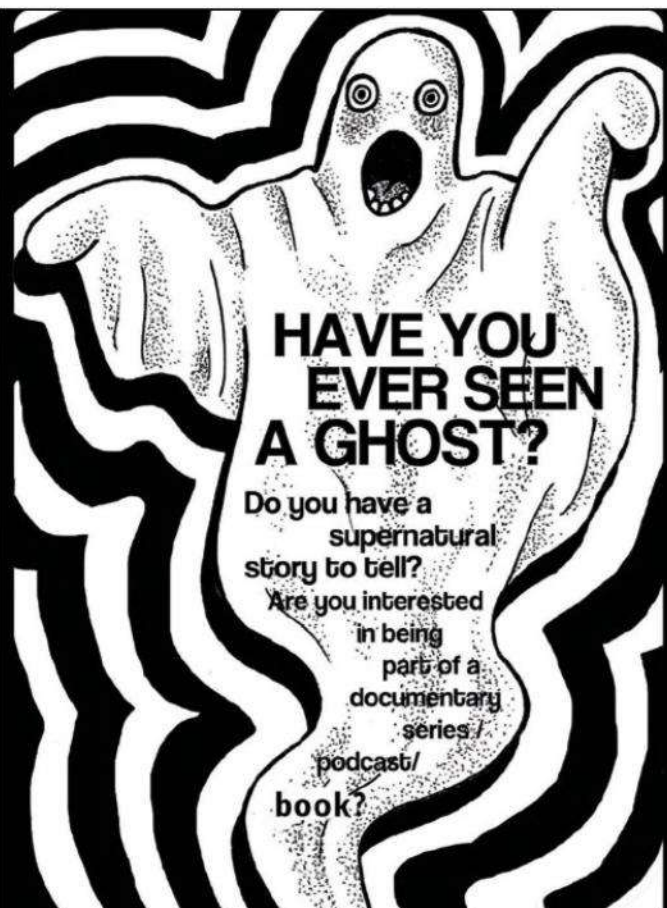
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# PECULIAR POSTCARDS



**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past tells the story of the somewhat mysterious Mlle Florence and her globe-walking exploits

## 32. FLORENCE ON THE GLOBE



ABOVE: Florence waving her flags, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 23 June 1903.

In June 1903, the American globe walker Mlle Florence announced that she would attempt to walk on a wooden rolling globe from London to Brighton, for a wager. There was immediate interest from the sporting world of the Metropolis, and the *Daily News* secured an interview with the heroine of the day. Florence was just 18 years old and born in New Jersey, she told the journalist; she had begun walking the globe at the age of just four, and was now very proficient. She had brought two globes with her to London,

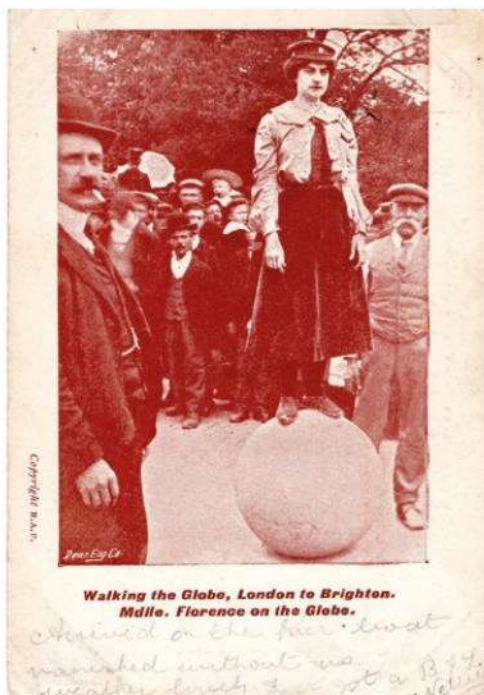
both made of hollow wood and covered with sheepskin: the lighter one, weighing just 20lb (9kg), would be used for uphill work, and the much heavier one, weighing 75lb (34kg), would be used for descending inclines or walking on level ground. Florence was quietly optimistic about her chances, although she would have to be on the globe for 10 hours per day, making an early start to avoid the crowds. She added that her 74-year-old father had come to London to accompany her on foot during the long trudge to Brighton.

On Tuesday 16 June 1903,

Florence set off from St Thomas's Hospital at 5.30am, passing through Brixton at 8.30am, and reaching the Greyhound Hotel at Croydon at 8.18pm, much fatigued after her lengthy struggle. Still, she was up and about at 5am the following day, and walked off on the globe. An eager crowd awaited her at Redhill in Surrey, but at Merstham she had to take a rest on account of fatigue, and two miles further, she gave up her journey for the day. While travelling on the globe, she took only beef extract and raw eggs, but in the evening,

she enjoyed a hearty meal together with her entourage. Three 'minders' accompanied Florence on her walk, to keep her path clear of people and prevent mischievous individuals from giving her a push. She made slow but steady progress, being hampered by steady rain that made the globe slippery. As she was approaching Brighton, a large van hit the globe, sending Florence flying. In spite of a sprained ankle, she struggled on throughout the night, being met on the London Road between Patcham and Brighton by enormous crowds, composed of





ABOVE LEFT: A postcard stamped and posted in August 1903, showing Florence on the globe. ABOVE RIGHT: Another, unposted card of Florence. BELOW: Florence on her walk from London to Brighton, from the *Illustrated Police Budget*.

all classes of society. A working-class family had been sitting at their doorstep all night, with rugs thrown over them, awaiting her arrival. So dense was the throng at the Brighton Aquarium that Florence stepped off the globe, being harassed by kindly people who offered her brandy, champagne and beer. In the end, a police inspector took her in his arms to protect her from the crowd, and carried her to a hansom nearby.

Having successfully walked on her globe from London to Brighton, winning her wager with nearly a full day to spare, Florence was the heroine of the day. Several picture postcards were issued, depicting her on the globe on her way to Brighton, and there was even a silent film recording her great achievement. An *Illustrated Police News* journalist managed to secure an interview with Florence, whom he described as a pretty, slightly-built girl of medium height, with her dark hair hanging in a knot behind her back. She wore a brown velvet yachting cap, with a badge showing the stars and stripes of her native land. Florence spoke in a strong 'Amurrican' accent, expressing delight that she had made it all the way to Brighton. The *Police News* draughtsman depicted her standing on the globe, waving the British and



American flags, and giving a speech to the crowd before being driven to her hotel in a cab, followed by a cheering mob.

Florence received a lucrative engagement at the Empire Music Hall in London, where she performed for several months to come, before

touring Leeds, Hull, Aberdeen, Middlesbrough and Oxford in September and October, being billed as the champion globe-walker of the world. In 1904, Florence visited Derby, Dundee, Northampton and Shields. In Dundee, she ascended the Hilltown on her globe, in front of an admiring crowd. In 1905 and 1906, she toured the provinces extensively, sharing the stage with a pantomime about Dick Whittington and his cat. In 1910 and 1911, she signed a contract with Bostock's circus, accompanying it on another extensive tour. When the circus came to town, she took part in an elaborate parade: "Mdle Florence, the Marvellous Globe Walker, who recently walked on her globe from London to Brighton, will walk on her globe (weather permitting) through the principal streets to the circus field on the opening night, commencing at 6.30pm, preceded by the Motor Car, which Abex, the Midget Hercules, will lift with his teeth at every performance."

The last mentions of Mlle Florence in the newspapers is that in December 1915, she was at the Royal Coliseum, Bury, and that in April 1916, she was with Bostock's circus in Derby. According to John Turner's privately published book *Victorian Arena*, Florence was the daughter of the clown Funny Fred Felix (1824-1920), whose real name was Milesen, and she married the circus strong man Abex. There is no record of a Florence Milesen (or Felix) being born in the mid-1880s, however, and her Transatlantic background was generally accepted at the time. The strong man Abex was also known as the 'Midget Hercules', indicating that he was a dwarf or at least very short-statured; again, it seems unlikely that Florence would have married him. I believe that the truth is that Florence really was born and bred in America, as was stated by many contemporary newspapers, although for some reason she wanted to keep her family name a secret throughout her show business career. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that she married and had children, after returning to the United States in 1916, and there are people on the Internet claiming to be her great-grandchildren.



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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 JAN 2023**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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# WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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## FORT SORTERS

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 1200, Whitstable, CT1 9RH.

## CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT427

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# PHENOMENOMIX

SUPERSTITIONS OF FISHING FOLK

HUNT EMERSON



YOUNG MAN, THE LIFE OF A FISHERMAN IS SHOT THROUGH WITH SUPERSTITION AND RITUAL!



A RED-HAIRED WOMAN IS SEEN AS BAD LUCK...

uh oh...



...AND IF A SEAMAN MEETS ONE ON HIS WAY TO WORK...

OH WELL, I CAN'T RISK SAILING TODAY...



THE FOX - ANOTHER REDHEAD - IS SIMILARLY BAD LUCK!

FOX AHoy! BEST NOT TO SAIL TODAY, BOYS!



HE HAS A FEAR OF THE HARE, WHOSE SUPERNATURAL POWERS MIGHT BE USED AGAINST HIM!



IN FACT, TALK ABOUT ANY ANIMALS ON BOARD SHIP IS FORBIDDEN!

THE SMALL GENTLEMAN WITH THE LONG EARS...

PSHHT! DON'T SPEAK OF HIM!



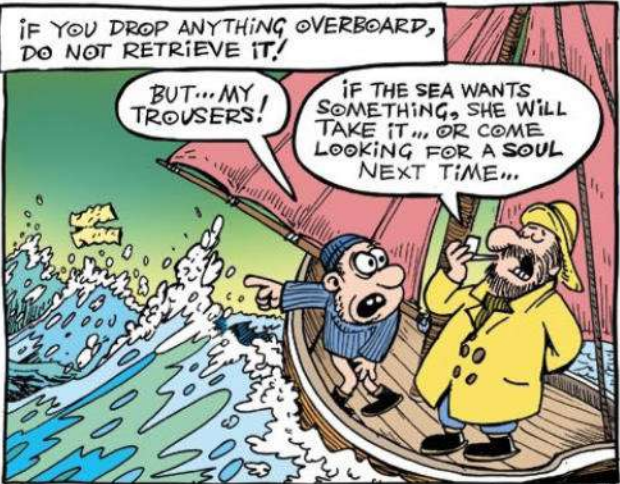
ALSO WHISTLING!



IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO CARRY A SPRIG OF ROWAN TREE, TO STAVE OFF THE EVIL EYE!



...AND MOUNTAIN ASH LEAVES HAVE SAVED MANY A SEAMAN FROM THE CURSE OF A SCORNFUL WIDOW!



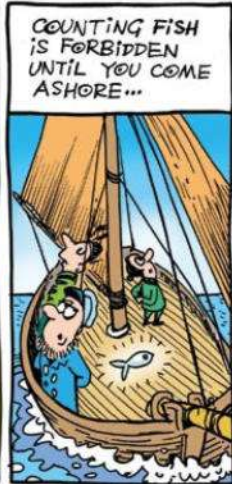
IF YOU DROP ANYTHING OVERBOARD, DO NOT RETRIEVE IT!

BUT...MY TROUSERS!

IF THE SEA WANTS SOMETHING, SHE WILL TAKE IT... OR COME LOOKING FOR A SOUL NEXT TIME...



ON LEAVING HARBOUR, TURN THE BOAT CLOCKWISE WITH THE SUN...



COUNTING FISH IS FORBIDDEN UNTIL YOU COME ASHORE...

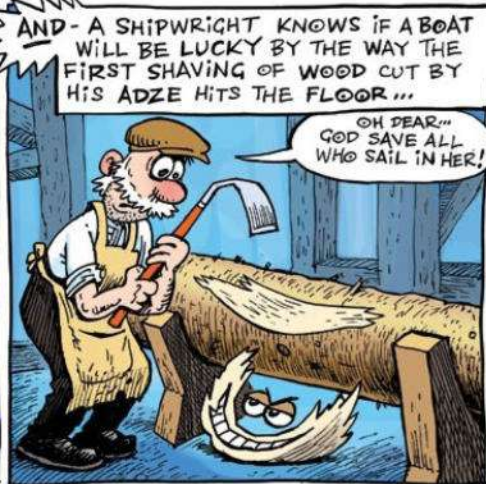


MAYDAY IS A BAD DAY TO SAIL!

DON'T START ANYTHING ON A THURSDAY!

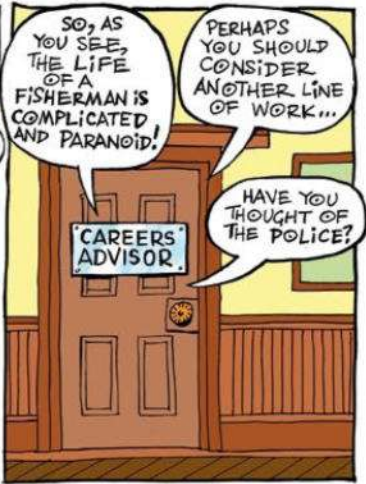


DON'T STICK A KNIFE IN THE MAST - IT OPENS A DOOR FOR EVIL SPIRITS...



AND - A SHIPWRIGHT KNOWS IF A BOAT WILL BE LUCKY BY THE WAY THE FIRST SHAVING OF WOOD CUT BY HIS ADZE HITS THE FLOOR...

OH DEAR... GOD SAVE ALL WHO SAIL IN HER!



SO, AS YOU SEE, THE LIFE OF A FISHERMAN IS COMPLICATED AND PARANOID!

PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ANOTHER LINE OF WORK...

HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF THE POLICE?

CAREERS ADVISOR



# COMING NEXT MONTH



## MOTHMAN RETURNS

WINGED WEIRDIES SEEN IN  
AMERICAN SKIES



## MAGIC IN HIS BONES

FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY  
AND FORTEANA

FLYING GOAT RIDERS,  
GHOSTS OF GLENCOE,  
THREE TALKING DOGS  
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 428  
ON SALE 26 JAN 2023

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Visiting the Ramdaha Falls of Chhattisgarh, a beauty spot in India, Shraddha Singh, 14, and her sister Shweta, 22, decided to take a selfie paddling in the pool at the bottom of the waterfalls, ignoring signs warning visitors of strong currents and deep water. Almost immediately, Shraddha lost her footing and got into difficulties, as did Shweta, trying to save her. Other members of the 15-strong family party rushed to help them, with their brother Himanshu, 18, their cousin Rishabh, 24 and his wife Sulekha, 22, jumping in holding hands to try and rescue the sisters, only to get into difficulties themselves. They were followed by brothers Abhay, 22, and Ratnesh, 26, who tried to help anyone they could, but who were also swept away. In all, six family members drowned in the pool, with only Sulekha being pulled out alive, but critically injured, after bystanders alerted emergency services. *thesun.co.uk*, 31 Aug 2022.

When a 54-year-old woman named only as Jahran went missing while collecting rubber on a plantation in Jambi province, Indonesia, her family and neighbours spent two days looking for her. They eventually discovered a 22-ft (6.7m) long python resting in a clearing, with a suspiciously large bulge in its stomach. "Residents killed the snake and dissected its stomach contents. Everyone was astonished. It turned out that the woman we were looking for was in the snake's stomach," said village head Anto. He believed that the snake had attacked Jahran by first biting her, then wrapping itself around her and squeezing until she suffocated, after which it would have taken the snake at least two hours to swallow the body. Villagers expressed concern, as this was only one of several giant pythons that has been seen in the area – three locals claimed to have tried to capture a 27-foot (8.2m) python, but said it had overwhelmed them and escaped – and the snakes had already eaten at least two village goats as well as Jahran. *mirror.co.uk*, 25 Oct 2022.

In Jackson, Mississippi, police were alerted to a body in a wooded area after receiving reports of a dog trotting through a neighbourhood in the south of the city carrying a severed human arm. Officers discovered a charred human arm in the road, and more body parts behind an abandoned house, but reported that

they could not locate the victim's head. They were also unable to say whether the body parts they found were removed before or after the victim's death. *wbay.com*, 7 Nov 2022.

While cleaning his gun at home in Salinas, California, off duty police officer Francisco Villicana, 22, accidentally fired the weapon. The bullet went straight through his hand, seriously injuring it, then hit passer-by Luis Alfredo Ferro-Sanchez in the chest. Both men were taken to hospital, where Ferro-Sanchez died. Police say the incident seemed to be an accident, but that the Monterey County District Attorney would be investigating. *ktvu.com*, 26 Oct 2022.

After travelling to Liverpool from Pwllheli, North Wales, for an evening out, Chloe Haynes, 21, and a friend took a room at the city's Adelphi Hotel. According to her mother, Nicola Williams, Chloe got up during the night: "It seems she has got up out of the bed confused, not knowing where she is, and she's opened the door of the wardrobe, maybe thinking it is the toilet or the door to go back out of the room. It was a big, old, heavy wardrobe and it fell on her and crushed her windpipe." Haynes was discovered by her friend in the early hours of the morning, and with the help of several other hotel guests they lifted the wardrobe off her but were too late to save her life. *metro.co.uk*, 30 Sept 2022.

As he was leaving a car park in Atlanta, Georgia, an unnamed man stopped at the ticket machine by the exit but forgot to put his automatic pickup truck in 'park' as he opened his door to pay for his ticket. His arm then became stuck and, as he struggled to free it, the truck moved forward and he was crushed to death between the vehicle and the ticket machine. *wsbtv.com*, 27 Oct 2022.

A dog walker found the body of Reginald Roach, 63, on the disused Bryn Cegin industrial estate in Bangor, Wales. Investigating, police found that he had bled to death after cutting off his genitals with a sharp implement. He had recently been convicted for exposing himself at a Travelodge Hotel after asking staff there to place a bet for him while naked from the waist down and had a previous conviction for destroying a poppy memorial after Remembrance Sunday in 2019. *mirror.co.uk*, 11 Nov 2022.





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